



Shareholder votes have prompted CMS Energy to make some changes

By [Chris Gautz | Jackson Citizen Patriot](#)

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Though two shareholder proposals that would have forced CMS Energy to change its environmental policies failed recently, they fared better than expected and have prompted the utility to make some changes.

One proposal that asked the board to prepare a report on the company's efforts to reduce "environmental and health hazards associated with coal combustion waste," received 43 percent of the vote at a May 21 shareholders' meeting. Another proposal that sought to have the CMS board adopt quantitative goals for reducing total greenhouse gas emissions garnered 35 percent.

CMS leaders urged shareholders to vote no, saying the proposals were unnecessary and would be burdensome. However, a spokesman said the utility got the message. "We've heard from the shareholders that, in a large sense, 'We want more information,'" said spokesman Jeff Holyfield.

The board and senior management have directed staff to create a corporate social responsibility page on the CMS website. The type of information it would contain still is being discussed, he said, but would likely include records and reports the utility files with state regulators.

Holyfield said he expected the new section of the website would be complete by year's end. Shareholder proposals are rare at CMS, and the opportunity to vote in favor of them was promoted in advertisements online and in the Citizen Patriot by The Sierra Club.

The first proposal was pitched by As You Sow, a California-based group that urges corporations to act in the long-term best interest of the environment.

"This vote sends a very strong message to CMS that shareholders are concerned about how the company is dealing with coal ash contamination of Saginaw Bay and also how it is managing risks at all its facilities to avoid future contamination and cleanup costs," Amy Galland, research director of As You Sow said in a statement.

The group said the vote total was higher than it expected.

Last month, As You Sow put forth a similar proposal with MDU Resources Group, the parent company of the Montana-Dakota Utilities Co., and it earned 26 percent of the vote; a proposal at Southern Company of Atlanta, a Georgia-based utility, won 17 percent of the vote.

The other shareholder proposal was the comptroller of New York City, which serves as custodian to the pension funds for the New York City police and fire departments.

While the outcome of the vote was not made known at the May 21 CMS board meeting, the vote totals were released in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission last week.

Holyfield said the utility is committed to making its environmental record more accessible.