

Pollution Control Board hearing
August 12, 2020, 6:15 – 6:30 p.m.
Leon Liebenberg

1. Good evening. And thank you for this opportunity.
2. We're in the middle of a pandemic. I am not talking about Covid-19. I am talking about the pandemic that we call "economic growth" and its adverse environmental and societal effects. Either we will change our narrow-scoped ways, or like other plaque species, we will reap the deadly crop of the seeds that we sow.
3. My brother was poisoned by mercury which apparently seeped into groundwater from nearby tailings of platinum and gold mines. He sustained permanent nerve damage, and who knows what other consequences could still arise?
4. My brother lives in Potchefstroom, 120 km from Johannesburg, South Africa. Being poisoned following disregard of proper engineering practices is not uncommon in a developing country like South Africa. By the way, thousands of other people were also poisoned by that mercury. No one would however assume responsibility. And it was too difficult to pinpoint the exact source of the groundwater contaminants.
5. That is the easy way out for utilities and such reactions might be expected in developing countries where the focus is on relentless "growth", with little regard for well-being. But such irresponsible and unethical actions are not expected from the world's wealthiest country.
6. It is shocking to learn about the blatant disregard of proper engineering practices in the US regarding disposal of coal combustion residuals. This not only pertains to surface impoundments, but certainly also to coal ash landfills.
7. Locally, there are a few examples of apparently sound land reclamation practices. It is also encouraging to learn that some utilities are cleaning up their act, like in South Carolina and Virginia.
8. I am however dumbstruck that coal ash is still not safely disposed of in most of the other 1000-or-so ash dumpsites in the US. Especially since coal ash contains higher concentrations of mercury than those in the tailings that caused my brother's poisoning. I shudder to think what the several other toxic heavy metals (including arsenic, cobalt, lithium, and uranium) associated with coal ash is doing to our groundwater, and to us.
9. Our failures and transgressions with dry storage of coal ash in landfills and wet storage in ponds surely cannot be ascribed to lack of knowledge. Rather, we will find that
 - ineffective company management
 - unacceptable and unethical engineering practices
 - non-enforcement of regulations and endless legal disputes, and
 - societal apathyare some of the reasons why we are fouling our own nest.
10. The remorseless workings of things appear to occur not for lack of, but *because* of rational actions. Addressing our coal ash dilemma (among many others) suggests a blending of rational thought *and* feeling — our evaluative ethical function. Solving this dilemma will also require diversity, open-mindedness, and the capacity to learn and change. Surely we can achieve that?
11. Thank you for your attention. And thank you to all at the i-EPA for your crucially important work.

From: [Liebenberg, Leon](#)
To: [Brown, Don](#)
Cc: [Andrew Rehn](#)
Subject: [External] Coal Ash Rulemaking
Date: Wednesday, August 12, 2020 6:46:23 PM
Attachments: [Pollution Control Board hearing-5.docx](#)

Dear Mr. Brown

Please find attached my comments which I made today at the coal ash public hearing.
I hope that this is helpful and would like to wish you the very best with your important work.

Sincerely
Leon Liebenberg