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To protect the citizens of Illinois it is imperative that the formulation of coal ash regulations be strict, guided by science, rather than by the economic interests of the coal industry or utility companies. Of course, that means a battle is brewing, since money always seems to talk loudly, to drown out common sense and the public interest.

The regulations must require that coal ash not be newly dumped or stored in a way that allows it to get wet. The regulations must require existing coal ash to be removed from any storage location that allows it to get wet. The regulations must not depend on the continued existence of some private company's ability to pump water away from storage locations. Finally, the ash must not be allowed to contaminate ground water.

Naturally, such regulations will be mightily resisted by industry, since compliance will be costly. But the responsible corporations have been making money for years using coal because they got away with not internalizing the true costs. The time has come for this accounting error to be corrected. The public interest, rather than the corporate interest, must be served by government.

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