

Electronic Filing: Received, Clerk's Office 10/30/2020 P.C. #119

From: [Ann Burger](#)
To: [Brown, Don](#)
Subject: [External] Coal Ash comment -- I hope I am not too late
Date: Friday, October 30, 2020 1:26:14 PM

I was not at all eager to write another letter, because, frankly, I am pandemically fatigued and politically anxious. Sadly, I am writing today precisely *because* I am pandemically exhausted and politically anxious. Since March I have learned more than I ever wanted to learn about what happens to the human heart and mind and body, to the family and the whole social fabric, when humans are forced to live with an invisible enemy that disables and kills. Worst of all, an enemy that resides silently, undetectably in the very stuff of life, in the case of Covid in the everywhere-ness of air.

Comparing coal ash contamination of drinking water to COVID is not an exact analogy. But it's close enough. Water is no less fundamental to life than air, and poisoned drinking water is no less life-threatening than a lethal virus. The heavy metals and other contaminants in coal ash, unavoidably ingested in water or breathed in as airborne particles from landfills, may do their awful damage more slowly than viral agents, but that just makes them all the more insidious. I worry that our children's and grandchildren's lives will be blighted, not by a pathogen that gives 2-4 weeks notice before striking, but by a "pandemic" of insidious slow-growing cancers that take breadwinners away from their families, by the heartbreaking signs of neurological damage in a developing child, by lifetimes darkened by chronic anxiety and hyper-alertness to signs of disease.

Any regulations less comprehensive, less clearly worded, or less rigorously enforced than the requirements which have been proposed by Prairie Rivers Network, Earth Justice, the Environmental Law and Policy Center, and the Sierra Club will not protect us or our children. Indeed, a more relaxed oversight process will all but certainly leave loopholes for companies to exploit and condemn communities throughout Illinois to becoming epidemiological clusters of preventable cancers and economic "dead zones."

Lastly, this pandemic has taught millions of us what wise and courageous leadership is – and, more importantly, is not. More and more thoughtful Americans are angry, legitimately angry, at leaders who could have acted with scientific foresight and empathy and principled truth-telling to protect human lives from COVID, but instead chose to reassure us that our government agencies and scientists would protect us, even as they were dismissing the very science and scientists that could have in fact spared us the worst. The devastating result for this nation is not only that tens of thousands of Americans have been sickened and died needlessly, but that many more Americans have lost faith in the very institutions that could, if they resolutely put human lives over corporate profits or political gain, truly make America safe, or at least safer, again. Please, please listen to the science regarding coal ash and human illness and act

decisively. And act with an eye to future generations, not short-term corporate profits.

Respectfully submitted,
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