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# Strong rules are needed to stop coal ash contamination in Illinois

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## Coal Ash Contamination Must Be Stopped

I have worked with the Sierra Club previously on this issue and here it is again, after I retired. Please see to it that this finally gets resolved or more people are going to wind up going through the multiple cancers that I have suffered. This is no joke.

Illinois has a serious problem with toxic coal ash, the residual waste created by burning coal for energy. This dangerous material, which for decades has been stored in mostly unlined impoundments near rivers and lakes, is leaking into groundwater and/or surface water at several sites. Right now, the rules for the Coal Ash Pollution Prevention Act are being written and reviewed by the Illinois Pollution Control Board. These rules will dictate how coal ash impoundments are to be cleaned up in order to halt the contamination of our waters. But will the rule be strong enough?

The contaminants, such as arsenic, lead, chromium and boron, are neurotoxins, carcinogens and other substances dangerous to humans.

At several sites across the state, these contaminants are merging with groundwater in quantities that make it unsafe to drink. At other sites, where the groundwater remains good, the leakage is contaminating surface water that we use for recreation. Rivers and lakes we cherish as getaway spots for weekend fun and relaxation may be taken away from us. Illinois needs a robust rule for the closure of coal ash ponds for several reasons. In some cases, natural occurrences such as floods or earth tremors could cause an impoundment to breach, releasing the deadly contents into adjacent waters. Ash at the Waukegan power plant is stored near Lake Michigan. Near me is the highly valued Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, our state's only National Scenic River, which is a victim of leaking impoundments located near the stream. How can we let this continue?

Removing and relocating the coal ash to high and dry ground, in lined impoundments where it can't mingle with our rivers and lakes, is the best solution for Illinois. Quicker and cheaper methods may appeal to some, but the science shows they are not safe.

Joan Slezak-Fritz

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