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From: [Aurora Flores](#)
To: [Brown, Don](#)
Cc: fpettis@cleanpowerlakecounty.org
Subject: [External] Public Comment: AS 2021-03: Adjusted Standard for the Waukegan Station
Date: Thursday, March 14, 2024 5:53:00 PM

Good evening,

My name is Aurora Flores-Gaytan. Originally from Mexico, I've been a resident of Waukegan for the majority of my life, where my family sought refuge similarly to many other families in this town. But our sanctuary is under siege by the callous disregard of corporations like NRG.

Although many of us have been illegalized by man-made borders, we have a deeper connection and care for this land that goes beyond mere ownership, unlike those who exploit and pollute it. We feel the land's pain, spiritually and physically, as its sickness reverberates through our bodies.

NRG's coal plant isn't just a facility, it's a grim reaper. Waukegan's residents are often the ones criminalized but my community is not a threat to me. The coal plant that claimed eighteen lives a year is a threat to me. The coal plant that caused 11 heart attacks and over 600 asthma attacks a year is a threat to me. It's criminal that we're mere collateral damage in the pursuit of profit.

It's no coincidence that the brunt of this pollution falls upon the shoulders of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Lake County's largest polluter taking years off our lives is the harsh truth of environmental racism. A predominantly white and affluent town like Lake Forest has an average lifespan of 79 years, while North Chicago's drops to 64, and Waukegan's to 68. I think of my grandpa who just turned 67, a year short of that.

My own family's story is a microcosm of the larger tragedy unfolding in Waukegan. My grandparents, who've lived in the shadow of NRG's coal ash ponds for over two decades, less than a 2-mile distance, are paying the price with their health. Their ailments, from high blood pressure to liver

issues, are directly linked to toxicants seeping from these ponds. With no healthcare and the health risks they face, they have no choice but to plan to leave the country they've made home. Pollution displaces people.

This issue will only be exacerbated by the elevated water levels we face from the climate crisis. How many more people will be forced to uproot their lives to escape the poison that surrounds us? What catastrophic event are we waiting for? For many of us, this is already a catastrophe as the deadly consequences of inaction consume our lives.

It's a human rights issue when we're slowly and painfully killed. It's a reproductive issue when our fertility is being harmed by antimony and manganese. It's an educational issue when students risk developmental issues from mercury. It's a mental health issue when we risk depression and irritability from selenium. The list goes on.

We're not asking for heroics, we're demanding humanity. It's dehumanizing to condense my love for my community into three minutes with the hope of convincing you we are worthy of life. We are. The time for accountability is now, and I'm urging you to say no to giving NRG another free pass at the expense of our lives and future.

Thank you,

Aurora Flores-Gaytan