

BEFORE THE ILLINOIS POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

In the Matter of:)
)
)
STANDARD FOR THE DISPOSAL OF)
COAL COMBUSTION RESIDUALS) PCB 2020-019
IN SURFACE IMPOUNDMENTS:) (Rulemaking - Water)
PROPOSED NEW 35 ILL. ADMIN.)
CODE 845)
)
)
)

NOTICE OF ELECTRONIC FILING

To: Attached Service List

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on August 27, 2020, I electronically filed with the Clerk of the Illinois Pollution Control Board (“Board”) the **PRE-FILED TESTIMONY OF JO LAKOTA**, a copy of which is served on you along with this notice.

Dated: August 27, 2020

Respectfully Submitted,

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BEFORE THE ILLINOIS POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
STANDARDS FOR THE DISPOSAL OF) R 20-19
COAL COMBUSTION RESIDUALS IN) (Rulemaking – Land)
SURFACE IMPOUNDMENTS: PROPOSED)
NEW 35 ILL. ADM. CODE 845)
)

PRE-FILED TESTIMONY OF JO LAKOTA

Greetings from Peoria, Illinois. My name is Jo Lakota. I am of Lakota and Walla Walla Native heritage. Closeness to the natural world is an instilled part of this heritage.

When I was 4 years old, my family moved from Michigan to Central Illinois. We lived in the Harrison Homes, public housing, a few miles from the Edwards Plant site. My Grandfather lived even closer in Bartonville. We ate from his garden.

My parents had no car and we walked almost daily into the fields, woods, and to Kickapoo Creek nearby. Our walks frequently were through the then future site of the Edwards Plant, as we made our way to visit friends and family in Pekin and in the direction of Hanna City. We foraged this very area for asparagus, mushrooms, wild berries, greens, osage staves for bow making, and for its pure beauty. Birds and wildlife, including lots of mostly harmless snakes, abounded. One distinct image in my mind was of a fairy ring of mushrooms under a sheltering tree. It was our Eden. We were poor, but unaware of it, as we were surrounded by the rich beauty of the Illinois River valley.

Shortly after I became a teenager, the Edwards Power Plant was built. My father stated that electricity was an experiment and that it would prove to be a mistake. He knew this because of the prophetic warnings of the deadly consequences of disturbing the Sleeping Monster (coal) and releasing the Black Snake (oil pipelines), a warning passed down for hundreds of years by indigenous cultures throughout the world in their oral traditions. We were duly warned!

After a few years of living in the Southwest, I returned to walk the old paths, only to find a cloverleaf of Interstate 474 had cut away the fields of wildflowers and access to the Kickapoo Creek where we fished. Where the woods and fields had once been, a vast swath of gray claylike substance created a dead zone. This place had become a landfill, a dump. The little lake, “the best fishing spot,” was poisoned. The fish, frogs, turtles, and water plants were gone. The whole valley became a Sacrifice Zone. I cried my heart out. Who would do such a thing? Who could not see the VALUE of this place?

I turned my energy to cleaning up empty lots and riverbanks. My husband gone, I raised my two little boys as I had been raised, wandering along the Illinois River, into the woods, along the creek. I also became involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

I completed college at ICC and Bradley. As a teacher, I took my students outside at every opportunity to learn, see, hear, sense in every way, their natural surroundings. Often challenged as to my purpose, I armed each student with a clipboard and an assignment. Learning first to be comfortable in Nature (It is not dirty.), learning to be still, seeing the differences in trees, identifying edible plants, hearing birdsong, and inhaling the fragrance of the pine were the tasks. I taught in Peoria and Pekin, and substitute taught in Bartonville one year.

Many were concerned about being outside. They could not breathe easily. I was startled by this and the number of students who either carried inhalers or rushed in panic to the nurse's office to use one. Even at an Indian school that I taught in, where many children lived in homes dependent on wood for cooking and heat, I had not seen this. Sulfur dioxide triggers asthma. Burning coal emits sulfur dioxide.

As a young teacher, I was required for one position to get a chest x-ray, monitoring for TB. "How long have you smoked?" asked the doctor. I have never smoked. He was skeptical. Spots on my lungs. "Well, if not, it's a good thing you didn't," he said.

One day, I asked my high school students how the lights in our classroom were powered. They knew about Powerton, a nearby plant, but did not know about the Edwards Plant. They could not identify coal as the source of this electricity, in spite of the fact that hundreds of train cars of coal visibly moved thru the town daily. . . in plain sight! The combination of the outdated Edwards Plant, Powerton, with the taller smokestack, Keystone, and the nearby Pottstown toxic waste dump create a top of the list dangerous scenario. Who, knowing that, would move here?

The adults, no better informed, that I encounter, either fishing, out for a walk, or in conversations react with disbelief, shock, and anger. "How could I not know this?" "Glad I don't live near there!" (They do.) "What about the EPA? There are laws!" They cannot believe that this is going on, allowed, under the watch of their elected officials. They are, for the most part, unaware of the six-year battle to close the Edwards Plant. They are not informed regarding the dangers and damage. When they consider that the health issues of family members and neighbors may be a result of this pollution, they are hurt and outraged.

They often are fishing for supper in these waters. Along Kickapoo Creek by Edwards, I see everyday people fishing—young people, young black men, and families, some even from Pekin. They sometimes throw the fish back, but usually they keep the fish for food. They should not be eating this fish. We hear veterinarians say that dogs should not go in the water, but I see people recreating in it and going jet skiing, but the people inevitably fall in and get a mouth full of that water.

Our major local newspaper and local news programs are hesitant to lose the financial support of such large companies as Ameren. The current owners of the plant, of course, are from Texas. Reporting on issues around the Edwards Plant has been back page and sketchy. Transparency is nonexistent. Information has not been forthright and accessible to the public.

But NOW, we have the opportunity to move in a new direction. We know better. We can do better. The excavation and burning of fossil fuel has been done without consideration for future generations. (Consider the Seven Generations impact called for in Native decision making.) We

must consider our children and grandchildren. We must think and act in a new way. Greed must not rule. Citizens need to be mindful in their use of energy. Selfishness has brought us here. Love for the unborn and for our beautiful planet, our Mother Earth who provides us with the water, air, and living soil necessary for life, must prevail.

I have seen the coal ash ponds at Edwards and Havana and I am concerned about coal ash and coal ash ponds at plants like these. Coal ash from Edwards coats the houses and cars on the bluff across the road from the plant. I am concerned about coal ash ponds at Edwards that are next to wetlands in areas that flood. It is not on high ground, but they are on the river. We get more flooding every year. In the summer of 2019, The Coal Ash Pollution Prevention Act was passed, setting up a rulemaking process for the development of regulations for coal ash sites like Edwards. We must mandate that these be **STRONG RULES**. We the people call for:

- **ROBUST** and **MEANINGFUL** public participation, including all key documents being made available for public review and comment in easily accessible places, such as libraries, community centers, web sites, etc. Generous timeline for the public to share and digest said documents. Public comment is only 30 days in the rule, but I would need two to three times more than that to inform people in the area about what is going on. There has to be enough time to share with people because they do not know what is going on and they do not get enough information from a sign. Notice and information has to be in lay terms or simpler language. The language should also alert people that this is something that they need to be informed about or aware of.
- **CAREFUL** and **CRITICAL** ongoing monitoring of the impounded coal ash.
- Assurance that coal ash **CANNOT** be exposed to water, further polluting surface and groundwater.
- Protection of the Community and workers from coal ash dust pollution through **STRONG** safeguards.
- **SERIOUS** Cleanup of contaminants already in the land and water to the extent possible.
- Set time limits on the closure of ash ponds. Set time limits on closure by excavation of coal ash and require safe transportation of coal ash by barge, rail, or low polluting trucks.

The future of human health, the quality of our drinking water, and the overall health of our environment are dependent on the safe and utterly secure closure of the coal ash impoundments and the toxic metals they contain.

No rollbacks of these rules should be allowed under the current federal administrative trend to roll back environmental protections. There will be life after this administration. **ALL** life needs to be protected.

Our **EARTH IS SACRED**. It is our only home, our only hope. There are **RULES** for living on our planet. Many of these have been violated in the last 200 years. There are consequences, some fatal, for destroying and damaging what does not belong to you. The Earth belongs to **ALL LIFE!**

Some of you may find yourself chuckling at my naiveté or rolling your eyes when I speak of our sacred Mother Earth, who provides all our needs for life. If so, this is because you are not awake to your place in this web of life. This is because you have forgotten your place in things, that you are on a planet, not of your making. Arrogance and Ignorance have gotten us to this place, more bizarre than any Twilight Zone episode. Where humans have to fight their fellow Earth citizens to keep them from destroying our planet. Let us AWAKEN! Let us move forward into the future with a new vision, with wisdom, and with hope.

Thank you.

By: _____

Jo Lakota

Dated: August 27, 2020

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned, Jeffrey T. Hammons, an attorney, certifies that I have served by email the Clerk and by email the individuals with email addresses named on the Service List provided on the Board's website, available at <https://pcb.illinois.gov/Cases/GetCaseDetailsById?caseId=16858>, a true and correct copy of the **PRE-FILED TESTIMONY OF JO LAKOTA** before 5 p.m. Central Time on August 27, 2020. The number of pages in the email transmission is 11 pages.

Respectfully Submitted,

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