

Twitter storm for 'Safe American Communities'

By Karl Burkart | November 15, 2010

EPAcoal.org launches Twitter campaign to send a powerful message of the support to the EPA for regulating toxic coal sludge so it doesn't enter water supplies of at-risk communities.



Source: NRDC Switchboard

It may come as a surprise to know that air pollution from coal-fired power plants is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency ([EPA](#)), but water pollution is not. A smorgasbord of toxic compounds from coal smokestacks, including high levels of lead, arsenic and mercury, are deposited in ponds that are in many cases located just yards from rivers and streams.

Worse still, many of these ponds are unlined, allowing the toxic sludge to seep into underground water supplies. There are more than [600 sites in 29 states](#) where coal sludge ponds threaten local communities, making their residents 2,000 times more susceptible to cancer.

For the next week, the EPA is taking comments on a proposed regulation called Subtitle C that would enforce strict guidelines on lining and maintaining these toxic water ponds. Unfortunately, due to heavy lobbying effort from coal companies, the EPA is required to also consider an alternative regulation, Subtitle D. Subtitle D is similar in wording, but removes the EPA's authority to inspect and enforce for compliance, leaving that deed to the power producers.

If you want an example of how great utilities are at regulating themselves, flash back to the horrific [Tennessee](#) Valley Authority's coal ash spill in Kingston, Tenn., in December 2008, when more than 1 billion gallons of slurry literally flooded the region in toxic sludge. The residents of Kingston would likely agree that a little EPA regulation could go a long way in preventing such disasters in the future.

The just-launched [EPAcoal website](#) provides more info and will send an automated letter directly to EPA head [Lisa P. Jackson](#) in support of Subtitle C.

The creators of this campaign, [As You Sow](#), e-mailed me a list of great factoids and are asking everyone to tweet and facebook as many of these facts as possible to raise awareness about this important issue and to let people know that they can do something by sending a comment. The more comments in support of Subtitle C, the stronger the case for the EPA to get to work in cleaning up the mess of unregulated coal power.

Here are the suggested tweets and factoids from the group, [www.epacoal.org](#):

- EPA has proposed two rules for storing coal ash. Rule C is for CLEAN. Rule D is for Dirty. Tell the EPA Yes on C.
- Burning coal makes toxic ash full of arsenic, mercury, lead and other heavy metals.
- Every year, 130 million tons of coal ash is produced in the U.S.
- We have until Nov. 19 to tell EPA Yes on C – store coal ash properly for Safe American Communities.
- 130 million tons: If you stacked it all on a football field, it would be 20 miles high.
- Coal ash is stored in massive sludge ponds. Toxins leach into the local water supply.
- Children are more susceptible to the health impacts of coal ash; 1.54 million children live near coal sites.

- There are thousands of sludge ponds in the U.S. near coal-burning power plants.
- The EPA says people living near coal ash ponds have cancer rates 2,000 times the acceptable risk.
- The EPA says that living near a coal pond is more dangerous than smoking 10 packs of cigarettes a day.
- Toxins from coal ash are linked to organ disease, cancer, respiratory illness and neurological damage.
- At least 137 sites in 34 states have been polluted by coal ash or scrubber sludge.

The TVA coal ash spill destroyed the town of Kingston, Tenn. Don't let that happen again!