

Burning coal in power plants produces a waste product called coal ash, a material that contains small amounts of potentially harmful chemicals. Environmentalists in the United States are concerned about the damage such harmful chemicals may be doing to the environment and suggest that the United States government should create new, much stricter regulations for handling and storing coal ash. However, representatives of power companies take the opposite view: they argue that new regulations are unnecessary and might actually have negative consequences. They use the following arguments to support their position.

**Regulations Exist First,** power company representatives point out that effective environmental regulations already exist. For example, one very important regulation requires companies to use liner—special material that prevents coal ash components from leaking into the soil and contaminating the surrounding environment. Companies that dispose of coal ash in disposal ponds or landfills must use liner in every new pond or landfill they build.

**Concerns About Recycling Coal Ash** Second, some analysts predict that creating very strict rules for storing and handling coal ash might discourage the recycling of coal ash into other products. Currently, a large portion of coal ash generated by power plants is recycled: it is used, for example, in building materials such as concrete and bricks. Recycling coal ash reduces the need to dispose of it in other ways and presents no environmental danger. However, if new, stricter rules are adopted for handling coal ash, consumers may become concerned that recycled coal ash products are just too dangerous, and may stop buying the products.

**Increased Cost** Finally, strict new regulations would result in a significant increase in disposal and handling costs for the power companies—perhaps as much as ten times the current costs. Power companies would be forced to increase the price of electricity, which would not be welcomed by the general public.

Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about. There should definitely be stricter rules adopted for handling and disposing of coal ash. First, the regulations we have now, for example those that require companies to use liner, are not really sufficient. Under the current regulations, liner has to be used only when a company builds a new landfill or a new pond. But companies are not required to add liner to old ponds and landfills. Yet several of those older disposal sites have caused significant damage—for example, the harmful chemicals from coal ash leaked into groundwater and contaminated drinking water. We absolutely need stricter new regulations that will prevent environmental damage at all coal ash disposal sites—the new sites as well as the old ones.

Second, stricter rules for handling coal ash won't necessarily mean that consumers will stop using recycled coal ash products. Let's look at how people responded to strict regulations for other dangerous materials. Take mercury, for example. Mercury is a fairly hazardous material, and it's been subject to very strict handling and storage rules for a long time. Yet despite those rules, it's been successfully and safely recycled for over 50 years and consumers have had very few concerns about it! So it's unlikely that consumers will become afraid to buy recycled coal ash products if stricter regulations are adopted.

Third, it's true that the cost of coal ash storage and handling will increase. But in this case, the result is well worth the extra cost. According to analysts, the cost to the power companies of implementing these rules would be about \$15 billion. That sounds like a lot, but when you actually do the math, it would increase the average consumer's household electricity bill by only about one percent! That's not a big

price to pay for having a cleaner environment.

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they challenge the specific arguments presented in the reading passage.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Teachers were more appreciated and valued by society in the past than they are nowadays. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.