

COAL ASH GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION

DOCUMENTING COAL ASH POLLUTION

In 2015, the EPA finalized the first federal regulation for the disposal of coal ash, a byproduct of burning coal. Coal ash is a major source of industrial waste in the U.S., with utilities generating around 100 millions tons of ash every year. For much of the last century, many utilities dumped this waste into unlined landfills and waste ponds, even though the lack of a barrier between the coal ash and groundwater left them vulnerable to leaks and contamination of underground water supplies.

One of the most important elements of the federal Coal Ash Rule is its groundwater monitoring program. Prior to 2015, there was no federal groundwater monitoring requirement. Some coal plant owners monitored their groundwater pursuant to state law, but many did not. The states that did require monitoring did not always require monitoring for all of the pollutants most likely to be associated with coal ash (e.g., boron, cobalt, molybdenum, sulfate), and each state had unique requirements. As a result, information about the groundwater impacts of coal ash was incomplete and inconsistent.

The Coal Ash Rule created a uniform national groundwater monitoring schedule and list of pollutants to be monitored, and it required that the data be publicly available. The first wave of data was posted online in March 2018.

The Environmental Integrity Project, Earthjustice, and other environmental groups are using the newly available data to examine coal ash contamination in states across U.S. in a series of reports. The analyses detail how multiple pollutants are leaking into groundwater at the vast majority of dumpsites where data are available.

Coal ash contains a toxic mix of pollutants including arsenic, boron, cadmium, chromium, lead, radium, selenium and more. These pollutants can cause cancer, heart disease, reproductive failure, strokes, and can inflict lasting neurological damage.

EIP is also compiling the results nationally on our Ashtracker website, which can be found at www.ashtracker.org (<http://www.ashtracker.org>).

REPORTS:

National Coal Ash Report: Coal’s Poisonous Legacy (<https://environmentalintegrity.org/reports/coals-poisonous-legacy/>)

Georgia: Groundwater Contamination at Georgia Coal Ash Dumpsites
(<https://environmentalintegrity.org/reports/groundwater-contamination-at-georgia-coal-ash-dumpsites/>)

Illinois: Groundwater Contamination at Illinois Coal Plants
(<https://environmentalintegrity.org/reports/groundwater-contamination-at-illinois-coal-plants/>)

Oklahoma: Groundwater Contamination Identified in Oklahoma’s Coal Ash Dumps
(<https://environmentalintegrity.org/news/groundwater-contamination-identified-in-oklahomas-coal-ash-dumps/>)

Texas: Groundwater Contamination from Texas Coal Ash Dumps
(<https://environmentalintegrity.org/reports/groundwater-contamination-from-texas-coal-ash-dumps/>)

EIP’S COAL ASH RULE GROUNDWATER MONITORING RESULTS DATABASE

The federal Coal Ash Rule required companies to sample groundwater at regulated coal ash dumps. Results were published in “Annual Groundwater Monitoring and Corrective Action Reports” that were made available to the public on company “[CCR Compliance](https://www.epa.gov/coalash/list-publicly-accessible-internet-sites-hosting-compliance-data-and-information-required) (<https://www.epa.gov/coalash/list-publicly-accessible-internet-sites-hosting-compliance-data-and-information-required>)” websites for the first time in March 2018. These reports are in PDF format, and many of them are thousands of pages long. This makes it difficult for citizens (who play a key role in enforcing the coal ash rule), reporters, regulators, and industry to evaluate groundwater conditions across multiple sites and geographic areas.

To make the data more accessible, EIP built a free, public, machine-readable database that contains monitoring results from 413 monitoring groundwater monitoring reports posted online by 265 regulated coal plants and coal ash dumps in 2018. Users are not authorized to use the database for commercial purposes. When using the data in reports or other publicly-available outlets, it should be credited to the Environmental Integrity Project.

Please complete the release form below to access the database. You will then be prompted to download an Excel file (~39 MB).
The data was updated on 04/30/2019.

Name *

FirstLast

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Organization: *

Reason for data request: *

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WASHINGTON, DC

1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005

Phone: (202) 296-8800
Fax: (202) 296-8822

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