



# AMERICA'S COAL ASH CRISIS

Each year, coal-fired power plants in the United States produce 140 million tons of hazardous solid waste, known as coal ash. Much of this waste is stored in more than 1,400 sites in 45 states.

Because vast quantities of water are consumed in coal power generation, these power plants lie beside large sources of water, including our great lakes, aquifers and many of our most important and iconic rivers. Coal ash, in turn, is regularly stored in haphazardly composed “pits” close to these plants and America’s major sources of drinking water.

When coal ash spills into our waterways or leaks or leaches into nearby groundwater due to the lax safety standards that allow these pits to exist, the toxins contained within pose serious health risks to nearby communities.

## **DANGEROUS COAL ASH**

Coal ash, the toxic by-product that is left over after coal is burned, contains high levels of dangerous heavy metals such as arsenic, lead, selenium, and other health threatening substances.

The public health hazards and environmental threats from unsafe coal ash storage, including increased risk of cancer, learning disabilities, neurological disorders, birth defects, reproductive failure, asthma and other illnesses, have been known for many years.

It’s alarming that despite our knowledge of these risks, our local and national protections against them have time and again been inadequate. Equally surprising is the fact that the technology for coal ash’s proper disposal and monitoring has been around for decades and is frequently used by municipal landfills, but not for the safe storage of toxic coal ash.

## WHY ACT NOW

Coal ash is dangerous. Coal ash is linked to the four leading causes of death in the United States: heart disease, cancer, respiratory diseases and stroke. The EPA found that a person living within one mile of an unlined coal ash pond that co-disposes of coal refuse has a 1 in 50 lifetime risk of cancer — more than 2,000 times higher than the EPA goal for cancer risk. Additionally, the EPA found that living near certain coal ash ponds is significantly more dangerous than smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. Most alarming was the EPA's finding that, 1.54 million American children live near coal ash storage facilities.

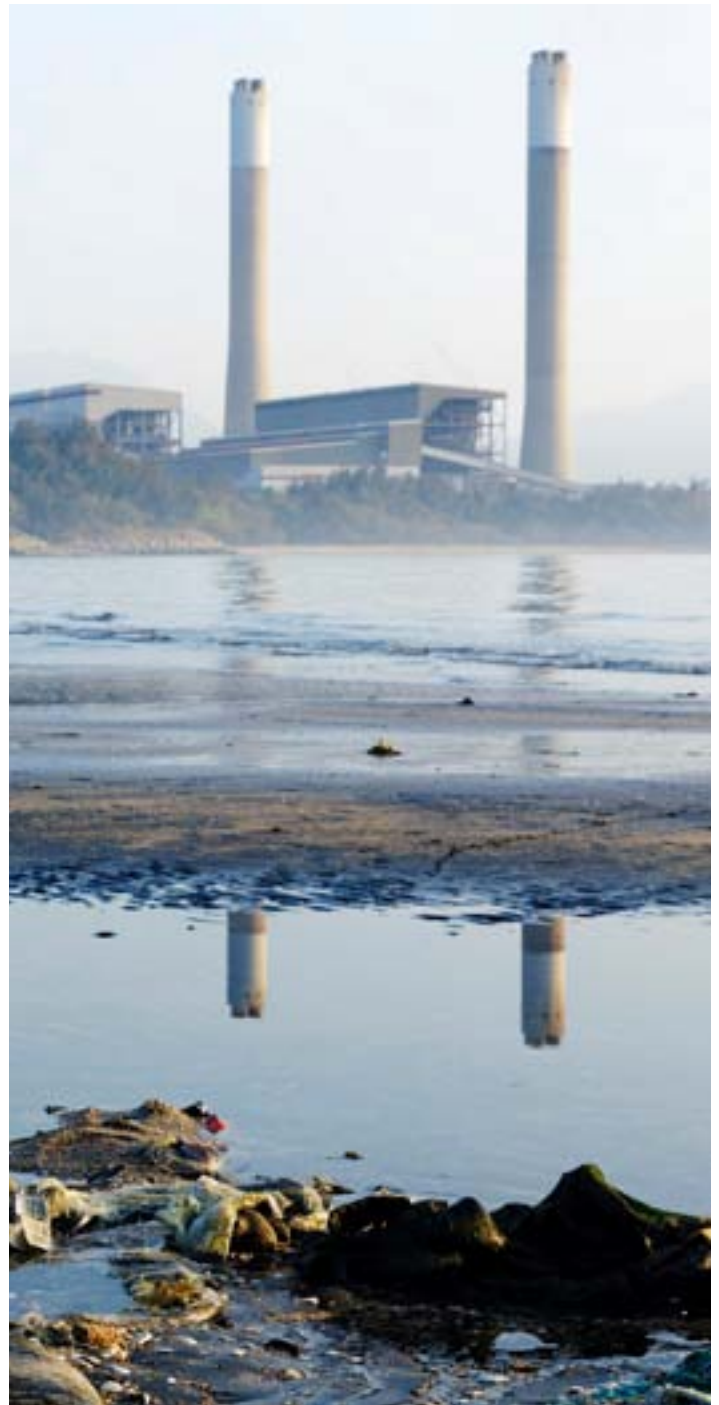
## THE SOLUTION

On December 19, The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the first-ever federal standards for the storage and disposal of coal ash aimed at protecting thousands of communities from the 140 million tons of ash pollution produced annually by America's coal plants.

While a good start, this rule does not go far enough to protect our communities. The proposed standard continues to allow utilities to dispose of coal ash in ponds and does not incorporate strong federal enforcement.

However, the Republican-held Congress is looking to further weaken the EPA proposal to make sure their polluter friends have no responsibility in dealing with the toxic coal ash they produce.

We need to tell Congress not to weaken the EPA final rule on coal ash by stripping the few provisions that give communities living with coal ash pollution a way to hold dirty coal plants accountable.



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