

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 14, 2018

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington D.C. 20004

Dear Acting Administrator Wheeler:

We write to express concern about the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) steps to roll back the 2015 Coal Ash Rule—a crucial regulation for toxic coal combustion residuals—and to urge the EPA to strengthen its standards to ensure safe disposal of coal ash, as required by the DC Circuit Court's decision in August.

A recent report by several environmental groups highlighted the harmful effects of coal ash in the State of Illinois. Industry reports required under the 2015 rule show that coal ash disposal ponds caused unsafe pollution levels of arsenic, cobalt and selenium in groundwater wells at 22 of the 24 power plant locations in Illinois (as shown on the attached map). This contamination threatens to spread to rivers, lakes, and drinking water sources throughout the State—including Lake Michigan, which provides drinking water to the Chicago area, and the Illinois River, home to diverse pool of aquatic species and wildlife and an important destination for recreational activities

Unfortunately, the severity of this problem is not limited to Illinois. These findings are proxies for the nationwide pollution problems caused by coal ash, which can be seen in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky. Given this data, it is unsurprising that the DC Circuit Court found the 2015 rule insufficient in preventing toxic pollution from leaching from inactive sites and coal ash disposal ponds into nearby groundwater. It's clear that coal ash, a brew of carcinogenic chemicals and heavy metals, is a danger to human health and the environment.

The proper disposal of coal ash is necessary for protecting humans and wildlife. We strongly urge you to consider new, stronger, more protective standards to ensure public health and environmental safety.

Sincerely,


RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator


TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senator

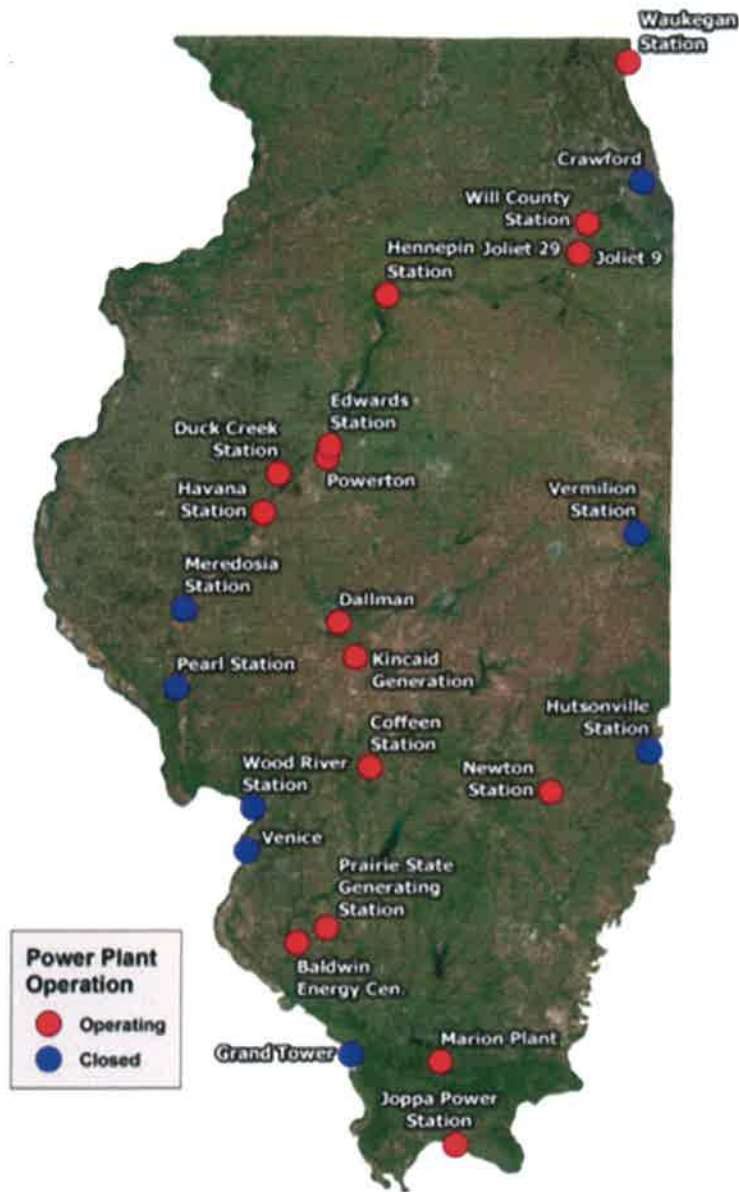


FIGURE 1: COAL ASH DUMPS IN ILLINOIS. RED PINS INDICATE AN ACTIVE COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT AT THE LOCATION; PURPLE PINS INDICATE RETIRED COAL PLANTS