Iowa Environmental Council

PROTECT IOWA'S HEALTH, WATER, and AIR from COAL ASH POLLUTION

IOWA'S COMMUNITIES, DRINKING WATER, AND AIR ARE AT RISK FROM CANCER-CAUSING POLLUTION CAUSED BY COAL ASH, A TOXIC BYPRODUCT OF BURNING COAL FOR ELECTRICITY.

AS MIDAMERICAN ENERGY AND ALLIANT ENERGY CONTINUE TO GENERATE COAL ASH AT THEIR IOWA PLANTS, CONTAMINATION THREATENS PUBLIC HEALTH, GROUNDWATER, AND MAJOR RIVERS ACROSS THE STATE.



WHY IS COAL ASH DANGEROUS?



Coal ash contains heavy metals including arsenic, mercury, lead, and cadmium, toxins that can cause serious health impacts even at low exposure levels.

- **INCREASED RISK OF CANCER**
- **KIDNEY AND LIVER DAMAGE**
- **HEART AND RESPIRATORY DISEASES**
- **REPRODUCTIVE AND IMMUNE SYSTEM DISORDERS**
- **NEUROLOGICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL HARM IN CHILDREN**

IOWA'S COAL ASH PROBLEM

In unlined or poorly lined ash landfills, carcinogenic toxins can seep into groundwater, increasing risks for health harms. If not capped during storage or transportation, dry coal ash can become windblown, exposing nearby residents and workers to airborne particles. Many Iowa communities already face nitrate contamination in drinking water sources; coal ash compounds the burden on public health and water systems.

- There are 69 known active and legacy utility coal ash disposal sites across 16 Iowa counties.
- Active coal plants and most of their coal ash disposal sites are located near the Missouri, Des Moines, and Mississippi Rivers — critical drinking water sources.
- Testing near disposal sites shows groundwater contamination exceeding federal safety standards for toxic metals for years, yet no cleanup has been implemented.

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ACCOUNTABILITY and ACTION to SOLVE IOWA'S COAL ASH PROBLEM



Public water utilities and everyday Iowans should not have to bear the health or financial costs of safeguarding water and air from toxic pollution from coal plants. Several facilities in Iowa that are owned or operated by MidAmerican and Alliant still discharge:

- Flue gas desulfurization (FGD) wastewater
- Bottom ash transport water
- Combustion residual leachate

These pollutants are avoidable with available, proven treatment technologies. The onus should be on coal-burning utility companies to implement these measures to protect our water and prevent cancer.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To safeguard Iowa's drinking water and public health, state legislators and regulators should:

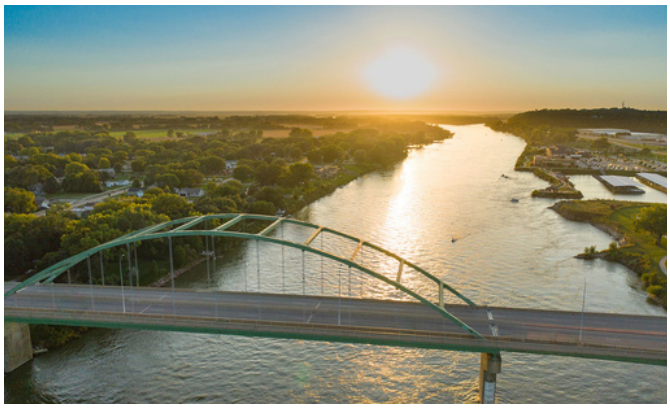
1 **REDUCE COAL ASH POLLUTION BY PROHIBITING UTILITIES FROM DISCHARGING TOXIC POLLUTANTS INTO WATER SOURCES NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 31, 2029.**

2 **DIRECT THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR) TO DEVELOP AND ENFORCE RULES IMPLEMENTING A COAL ASH POLLUTION PROHIBITION.**

WHY WE NEED ACTION

Iowans deserve transparency and accountability when it comes to what's in our water and air. Allowing utilities to discharge toxic coal ash puts human health, ecosystems, and public trust at risk — at at time when cancer rates in Iowa are skyrocketing. After years of decline, Iowa's share of energy production from burning coal actually increased in 2025.

With existing technology and strong policy action, Iowa can prevent further contamination and ensure safe, reliable water for Iowans and long-term health for our communities.



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