

Oral Comments on EPA 2026 Proposed Amendments to the Coal Combustion Residuals Regulations, Docket ID EPA-HQ-OLEM-2020-0107

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I am speaking on behalf of the nonprofit Iowa Environmental Council, an alliance of more than 100 organizations and hundreds of Iowans who care deeply about protecting our state's air, water, and public health.

We oppose the proposed weakening of the Coal Combustion Residuals Rule.

In Iowa, the need for stronger oversight of coal ash disposal is clear and urgent. Recent analysis shows that groundwater contamination exceeding federal health standards has been documented at nine of Iowa's twelve coal power plants with regulated disposal sites. Contaminants found at these facilities include arsenic, selenium, cobalt, lithium, cadmium, and radium.

These are not minor or isolated problems. Iowa currently stores nearly 19 million cubic yards of coal ash in regulated disposal sites, and the actual amount may be even greater because some facilities lack complete reporting data.

The proposed rule would expand site-specific compliance pathways and provide additional flexibility for closure requirements. But experience shows these mechanisms often delay accountability instead of protecting communities.

For example, EPA has already found that nearly all Alternate Source Demonstrations reviewed nationwide failed to prove that contamination came from somewhere other than coal ash facilities. Yet these claims can still postpone cleanup efforts for years.

We are already seeing the consequences in Iowa. At the Lansing facility, arsenic concentrations reached six times the federal drinking water standard, yet the facility concluded that no further corrective action was needed. At the Ottumwa Generating Station, cobalt contamination has exceeded federal groundwater protection standards since 2019, and cleanup efforts continue today.

The proposal would also allow groundwater monitoring farther away from disposal sites. That is especially concerning here in Iowa, where more than 75 percent of residents rely

on groundwater for drinking water, including many families using private wells that may not receive regular testing or treatment.

Early detection matters. Delayed monitoring means delayed cleanup, and delayed cleanup increases the risk to nearby communities and drinking water resources.

We are also concerned about weakened oversight of legacy coal ash sites. Iowa has approximately 25 sites that fall under legacy CCR oversight, many of them older and unlined. EPA's own analysis has shown that pollution from coal ash can continue for decades after closure, with peak contamination risks occurring as long as 105 years after waste placement. Closure cannot mean the end of responsibility.

Finally, EPA should reconsider proposals to weaken safeguards around the beneficial reuse of coal ash. In Iowa alone, about 200,000 tons of coal ash were reused in construction-related applications in 2024. Without strong environmental review requirements, toxic contaminants such as arsenic, lead, mercury, and chromium could pose additional risks to soil, groundwater, and surrounding communities.

The evidence from Iowa demonstrates that coal ash contamination remains a serious and ongoing threat. Weakening federal safeguards now would reduce accountability and increase risks to public health and water quality.

We urge EPA to protect Iowans and to withdraw these proposed amendments. Instead, the agency should strengthen enforcement of existing protections, maintain robust groundwater monitoring requirements, preserve oversight of legacy sites, and ensure meaningful review of coal ash reuse practices.