

EIP REPORT: 116 DISPOSAL SITES AT 49 COAL-FIRED POWER PLANTS POLLUTED WITH ARSENIC OR OTHER TOXINS

EPA Freedom of Information Act Request Uncovers Violations of Safe Drinking Water Act and Public Health Risks at 28 Previously Unidentified Collection Ponds in CO, IA, NC, SC, TX and WV

WASHINGTON, D.C.///April 26, 2012// At least 49 power plants have acknowledged groundwater contamination at levels that exceed federal or state standards, according to data submitted to the USEPA Office of Water and obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request by the Environmental Integrity Project (EIP). At least 28 of those have come to light only recently, including five in West Virginia, three in Iowa, North Carolina, and Texas, and two each in Colorado and South Carolina (see analysis and highlighted attachment).

Plants reported exceeding federal or state groundwater standards for at least multiple pollutants that are subject to Safe Drinking Water Act or federal Health Advisory standards, including:

- Arsenic (a potent carcinogen) at no fewer than 22 plants;
- Manganese (a metal that can damage the nervous system in high concentrations) at 22;
- Boron (a pollutant that can cause damage to the stomach, intestines, liver, kidney, and brain when ingested in large amounts) at 12;
- Selenium (a toxic pollutant that causes adverse health effects at high exposures) at 13; and
- Cadmium (a toxic pollutant that can damage the kidneys, lungs, and bones) at 10.

Standards for some of these pollutants were frequently exceeded at more than one disposal unit on the plant's site, and at many ash ponds or landfills, the standards were exceeded for multiple pollutants. Specific data about actual concentration levels is not available, because it was not requested by EPA.

The information was originally requested by the USEPA Office of Water to help the agency evaluate the potential toxicity of wastewater containing ash or scrubber sludge that may be discharged to rivers or lakes. Forty two of the 91 coal-fired plants surveyed by EPA either did not respond, had no groundwater monitoring data, reported that available monitoring did not indicate that any standards had been exceeded, or claimed confidentiality. Plants responding to EPA's survey may be measuring some, but not all, contaminants subject to health-based standards, and lack of uniform monitoring standards for coal ash disposal sites means that methods of detection and measurement vary from state to state.

EIP Director Eric Schaeffer said: **“Some of these plants were under the radar, and had never been identified before by EPA or in our earlier reports on Ash Ponds and landfills. EPA’s Office of Solid Waste is still grinding away on proposed standards for coal ash disposal – more than three years after the TVA spill – but has somehow never found the time to require testing of the groundwater next to coal ash sites, or even to systematically collect the data that is already there. This “see no evil” approach leaves the public at risk, and makes it easier for polluters to duck responsibility for a growing problem.”**

ABOUT EIP

The Environmental Integrity Project (<http://www.environmentalintegrity.org>) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization established in March of 2002 by former EPA enforcement attorneys to advocate for effective enforcement of environmental laws. EIP has three goals: 1) to provide objective analyses of how the failure to enforce or implement environmental laws increases pollution and affects public health; 2) to hold federal and state agencies, as well as individual corporations, accountable for failing to enforce or comply with environmental laws; and 3) to help local communities obtain the protection of environmental laws.

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