

PRESS RELEASE

for more information:
Elizabeth Crowe, Kentucky Environmental Foundation (859) 986-0868
Lauren McGrath, Sierra Club (859) 309-0214

For immediate release: Monday, February 28, 2011

GROUPS PRESS CONGRESS TO PROTECT KENTUCKIANS' HEALTH FROM TOXIC COAL ASH POLLUTION

*More protective regulation of coal ash could mean fewer
chronic illnesses, improved health for Kentucky families*

After the U.S. House of Representatives voted to attack federal authority on toxic coal ash standards, Kentucky environmental, health and economic justice groups are asking Senators Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul to support the Environmental Protection Agency's authority to implement standards that would better protect public health and reduce chronic diseases.

In a letter to U.S. Senators, sent last week, 183 groups from all 50 states asked the Senate to vote "no" on budget continuing resolution riders that would defund the EPA's work on coal ash standards. The Energy Information Agency calculates that coal power plants in Kentucky generate 8.6 million tons of coal waste each year, that is accumulating in 44 coal ash impoundments and continually release toxic mercury, selenium, arsenic and hexavalent chromium into our water and food chain. Seven of these coal ash sites have been designated as "high hazard" by EPA, which means that a break in the impoundment would result in significant environmental damage, illnesses or deaths.

Dr. John Belanger, a physician who directs a clinic in Garrard County serving low-income patients said, "There is clear evidence that the more soot in the air and heavy metals in the water, the more illnesses we endure. Cutting funding for pollution-controlling standards will cut our ability to save lives and that's not a fair trade for Kentucky or any other state."

All of Kentucky's U.S. Representatives but Louisville's Representative Yarmuth supported a rider to defund the EPA on coal ash regulations, citing budget concerns. However health costs associated with illness from soot and other pollutants from coal plants are estimated by the National Research Council in 2010 to roughly \$62 billion per year.

Debra Walker has lived on Cane Run Road next to the LG&E Mill Creek coal power plant and massive coal ash pile for 22 years. In that time, she and her family have suffered tremendously from the plant's toxic soot pollution and the drifting coal ash dust. "I don't want my granddaughter growing up here," Debra says. "We're scared to death of living here next to a coal plant, but we can't sell our house. My whole family has been sick, and the only chance we have is for the EPA to clean up all this mess."

In addition to health concerns, Kentuckians cite economic and recreational reasons for supporting more protective pollution standards. Rock climber and owner of Lexington climbing gym Bluegrass Bouldering, Bram Bell added, "As someone who loves the outdoors and owns a small business based on outdoor recreation, I think its critical that the EPA pass rules that protect our health and ability to explore and recreate in the Bluegrass State without injuring our bodies simply from breathing. Updated air quality standards must be set so all can live to appreciate Kentucky's natural beauty."

In addition to the organization letters flooding the U.S. House and Senate on EPA's coal ash regulation, hundreds of Kentuckians from all over the state have been calling and emailing legislators asking them to let EPA do its job to protect our health and the environment.

"Kentuckians value good health and a clean environment," said Deborah Payne, MPH, Energy and Health Coordinator with the Kentucky Environmental Foundation. "It's time more of our legislators have the courage to stand up for these values, and let federal agencies do their job to ensure we have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink."

###

A copy of the letter can be found at <http://kyenvironmentalfoundation.org>