

Coal ash victims invite White House regulator to visit their homes, see damage

Meigs County, Ohio joins communities across the country to tell OIRA their stories of poisoned drinking water and plummeting home values

Cleveland, Ohio March 18-- Ohio Citizen Action today urged OIRA Administrator Cass Sunstein to accept the invitations he is receiving to visit the homes of people in Ohio and across the country whose communities have been devastated by Toxic Coal Ash. The letters, including that of Elisa Young of Meigs County, recount individuals' experiences of living in communities where coal ash has poisoned drinking water, endangered people's health, and caused home values to plummet.

Coal ash, an unregulated hazardous byproduct of burning coal, has been dumped into communities across America, contaminating groundwater and drinking water with toxic metals including arsenic, mercury, lead and boron.

Last October, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed new rules to regulate coal ash disposal, but the new protections have been [stalled for five months](#) at the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, headed by Cass Sunstein. Since his office received the proposed regulations, Sunstein's staff has met with representatives of the coal and fly ash industries more than 20 times, but only met with a handful of citizens personally affected by coal ash. Sunstein has not made any public trips to see the real-life effects of coal ash on communities across America.

In Meigs County, Ohio, Elisa Young-- a ninth-generation Appalachian and cancer survivor-- lives surrounded by four coal-fired power plants in an 11.5 mile radius, and is desperately fighting to stop multiple proposed plants from being built in the area. The rate of cancer and other serious health problems among her neighbors has soared. "Where is the justice in allowing a community already saturated in coal waste and with these kinds of health statistics to continue to bear the brunt of this burden with no regulatory oversight?" Young wrote in a letter to Sunstein. "I'm writing you today to invite you to our community so you can hear our story and hopefully help us."

"Coal ash is a dangerous substance that hurts individuals and devastates communities," said Rachael Belz of Ohio Citizen Action. "Cass Sunstein needs to know that Ohioans won't stand for him granting favors to coal companies and power plants while ignoring the needs of people like Elisa. We're calling on Sunstein not only to read the letters that coal ash victims have sent him, but to visit their communities and see the devastation for himself."

Below are just a few excerpts from letters that citizens have sent to Sunstein, telling their stories and inviting the OIRA Administrator to visit their homes and view the devastation of coal ash first-hand. You can read the full letters on the Ohio Citizen Action [website](#).

- [Steve Scarborough, on behalf of Roane County, Tennessee](#), where two years ago a coal waste pond burst, covering the area with 1.1 billion gallons of coal ash, wrote: "Even though this happened more than 14 months ago, our lives are still heavily impacted by the coal ash and it appears that 500 million pounds of ash have been washed past the Emory River channel and into our prized Watts Barr Lake where it will most likely be left for all eternity. Our fishery was already nearing a reproductive tipping point due to coal mining in the upper watersheds and 50 years of TVA coal ash discharges containing selenium, arsenic, and other heavy metal into the lake."
- [John Wathen, on behalf of Uniontown Alabama](#), the community that has been receiving coal ash from the Roane County, Tenn. cleanup, wrote: "Trucks unload the ash within 200 feet away from people's homes. They are also intentionally washing it off train cars and trucks into a stream. This leaves people like my friend Ruby Holmes without the slightest hope to plant a garden. Ruby points out that growing a garden is not just a pastime – people in this community raise their food."

They raise cows for slaughter, not for pets. If they can't raise their food, what have we done to them?"

- Diane Neugebauer, on behalf of Greene Township, Pennsylvania wrote: "Since 1975, our community has been a depository for coal ash with a wet impoundment named Little Blue Run. At 1,300 acres in size, Little Blue Run is everything but little. As a small, agricultural community, we have been overwhelmed by issues related to this massive dump. Our groundwater, which sustains both people and animals, is contaminated; coal ash dust blows across people's properties during wind storms; and health issues run rampant.... Recently, I helped gather signatures of community members who also oppose this new dump. By the time I was finished, I had 536 signatures and an entirely new perspective on how desperate my community is for help. I met with people who were too sick to get out of bed, who couldn't breathe on their own, or write their own name; all of these people desperately wanted to sign the petition. We are already broken, how do they have the nerve to demand more from us?"
- Elisa Young, on behalf of Meigs County, Ohio wrote: "They have lined our kids' running tracks with power plant waste, filled in roads with it along the Ohio River causing huge fish kills, and even made cattle feeders out of it. One of the proposed power plants here had put it into their application that they wanted to contract with Anderson's to build a fertilizer factory to convert power plant waste directly into agricultural use fertilizer. We fought that plant and won, but what if we hadn't? Would coal ash be peppered across our corn and tomatoes, completely unregulated? I understand there are communities where they are already doing that. Thank God we are not one of them."

Ohio Citizen Action is 80,000 Ohioans who have joined together to prevent pollution. Non-profit and non-partisan, Ohio Citizen Action was founded in 1975. The organization's website can be found at:

<http://www.ohiocitizen.org>

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