

**Sierra Club  
Prairie Rivers Network**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 26, 2010

Contact:

Becki Clayborn, Regional Representative, Sierra Club, 815-236-9479 cell

Traci Barkley, Water Resources Scientist, Prairie Rivers Network, 217/621-3013 cell

**New Report Reveals Toxic Coal Ash Contamination in Illinois:  
Levels of Groundwater Contamination in Marion Exceeds Standards**

Marion, IL: As the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers whether and how to regulate toxic waste from coal plants, Environmental Integrity Project, Earthjustice and Sierra Club issued a report today on the nationwide scope of the problem. The report, *In Harm's Way*, reveals more than three dozen new sites in 21 states where toxic coal waste has made water supplies unsafe, including Southern Illinois Power Company's Marion coal fired power plant. It documents the steadily growing number of waters known to be poisoned by poor management of the toxic ash left over after coal is burned for electricity.

"For years nobody, including the Environmental Protection Agency, has had a full picture of how much of this toxic waste is out there, where it is, or if it is staying put. It has been dumped with no federal oversight, and inadequate state policies," said Lyndsay Moseley, a federal policy representative with the Sierra Club. "Now that we're aware of the problem, it seems we are finding contamination everywhere we look."

Toxic heavy metals, arsenic and lead were consistently found at levels well above what is considered safe for drinking water. The data shows that this toxic coal ash pollution is flowing into nearby communities, polluting private drinking water wells and even putting some public water supply wells at risk.

The pollution in coal ash is known to cause cancer, organ disease, respiratory illness, and neurological damage and development problems.

At the Southern Illinois Power Cooperative's (SIPC) Marion Power Plant, coal fly ash, bottom ash, and flue gas desulfurization (FGD) sludge have been placed in six unlined ponds, one unlined landfill and one lined pond since 1963. Groundwater monitoring has been required in the vicinity of the landfill and ponds since 1994, and high concentrations of the toxic heavy metal cadmium were first detected in 1997. Groundwater monitoring has also shown significant concentrations of iron, aluminum, boron and manganese. These contaminants are also being found in nearby Saline Creek, indicating that the contaminants are not staying in one area.

Nationwide, states responsible for only four of the 35 sites have required an investigation to determine the scale of the pollution. Not one state has required the toxic pollution to be stopped, let alone cleaned up—further underscoring the need for strong federal regulations.

“People wrongly assume that the Clean Air Act cleaned up coal,” said Traci Barkley, Water Resources Scientist with Prairie Rivers Network. “But much of the pollution now saved from our air is dumped in our water - at ponds, landfills, and pits where coal ash gets dumped. A slow seepage of the ash’s metals has poisoned water supplies, damaged ecosystems, and jeopardized citizens’ health. Unfortunately, the Illinois communities of Marion, Joliet, Venice, Oakwood, Havana, Alton, Powerton, Hennepin, Hutsonville, Canton, Wood River, and Coffeen now know this. We need Lisa Jackson and EPA to stand up to the coal lobby and create enforceable, federal protections for our communities.”

“We can’t ignore the very real risks posed by this toxic mess any longer,” said Barbara McKasson, Illinois Chapter Sierra Club Shawnee Group Chair . We need Lisa Jackson and EPA to stand up to the coal lobby and create enforceable, federal protections for our communities.”

The report comes just days before the EPA begins a series of hearings across the country to gather public comment on new protections from toxic coal ash. Details on the hearings, which will be held in Virginia, Colorado, Texas, North Carolina, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Kentucky, can be found at [www.sierraclub.org/coalash](http://www.sierraclub.org/coalash).  
Read the full report here: [action.sierraclub.org/harmsway](http://action.sierraclub.org/harmsway)

###