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4. **MINING:** Coal ash contaminating groundwater, group claims (09/20/2007)

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A commonly used method to reduce acid drainage at coal mines may be causing more harm than the problem it is supposed to fix, according to a report issued this week. A review of state monitoring statistics for 15 active or abandoned mines in Pennsylvania indicates that in at least 10 instances, coal combustion waste (CCW) appears to be leeching arsenic and heavy metals into nearby groundwater and streams in unsafe levels.

The **report** from the Clean Air Task Force and Earthjustice, called "Impacts on Water Quality from Placement of Coal Combustion Waste in Pennsylvania Coal Mines," reviewed state records to test the state's contention that the minefilling process is beneficial and does not cause groundwater pollution. It claims that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection is failing to safeguard public health by allowing the use of such waste – often in the form of a mixture of fly ash and cement kiln dust – to be used in hundreds of mine sites in the state. Mine owners often use such material to fill in mines or sections no longer used as a way to stop pools of acid-laced water from draining out.

Jeff Stant, director of the Pennsylvania Minefill Research Project, who co-authored the report for CAFT, said that not only were acid levels higher at six of the sites, but the presence of acid in drinking water supplies poses a cancer risk for nearby communities.



Mines that inject coal waste as a way to reduce acid water flows may be contaminating groundwater drinking sources, said an environmental group this week. State officials, however, maintain they have not seen the problems described. Photo courtesy of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

to states.

Ron Ruman, information specialist for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, told *Land Letter* that the CAFT report is being reviewed, but that "coal ash has been used in Pennsylvania for more than two decades, and we have not found the same kinds of issues."

The material has been used both for mine filling at abandoned sites and for reclaiming surface lands that have been mined in the past, he said.

There are about 120 active anthracite mines and 263 active bituminous mines in the state, he said, but more than 5,000

The study also criticized monitoring at the mines as lax or inadequate to differentiate ash pollution from the mine pollution it is supposed to minimize.

The study concludes "monitoring data indicates permitted CCW minefilling in Pennsylvania has resulted in groundwater and/or surface water contamination." Although two sites did appear to have water quality improvements "post-project monitoring was far too brief to assert that water quality improvements were more than temporary," the report stated.

Among a list of more than a dozen recommendations, the authors of the report urged the Pennsylvania environmental officials to require "accurate and thorough" waste characterization before permitting the use of coal ash for minefilling, mandate long-term monitoring at all sites, and enact enforceable standards.

If the state will not do so, Stant called upon U.S. EPA to step in to protect the health of communities near mines. Although EPA and the National Academies of Science have recognized a need for enforceable federal regulations, the jobs of permitting and policing contamination is generally left