

House of Representative Subcommittee on Energy and Environment  
Testimony of Gayle Queen  
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My name is Gayle Queen. I live at 2401 Queen Mitchell Road in Gambrills, Maryland. My family has lived in this area for over 100 years.

I am 56 years old and a widow. I am no longer employed. I lived in the Gambrills community while for over 10 years during that time 4.1 million tons of coal ash was dumped next to my home by a power company.

I am here to tell you about what happened in Gambrills, Maryland and how the contamination of the air and drinking water has affected my health, the health of my family and community. I am here today to ask you to make sure that Congress passes legislation so that another community doesn't have to suffer like my community.

The coal ash was dumped into an unlined, 80 foot deep pit on 84 acres. The coal ash went into an aquifer that supplies my communities' drinking water, and we all breathed the dust in. Once the community was informed of the problem in 2007, we were given no help by the state or federal governments. Later, one of the "solutions" was to hook up some of my neighbors to a fire hydrant for their water. The hoses froze in the winter. For other people, bottled water was supplied. But this did nothing for our past exposure, both in our drinking water and in the air.

The problems in Gambrills with coal ash started in the 1990s at another coal ash dump site when the power company dumped coal ash in another community. The residents of that community complained about the dust from the trucks dumping the coal ash and the grading on the site. When it was required to have a continuous 30-inch thick layer of clay at the bottom of that ash pit, the power company decided to dump coal ash near my home.

There was supposed to be no contact between the coal ash and the surface or ground water with a four foot separation between the coal ash and ground water. No expensive liner or 30 inch layer of clay was required at the Gambrills site.

Sadly, the coal ash went directly into standing water, in a sand and gravel pit which had excavations as deep as 80 feet! There was no liner or four foot barrier either. The truck drivers who dumped the coal ash said that there was water often sitting in those pits, even without any recent rain.

My community was never warned of the dangers of toxic coal ash, or that it could go into our water and our lungs and cause injury.

Starting in 1999 and through 2007 tests showed that arsenic, iron, manganese, and sulfate were being leached at dangerous levels and finally these dangerous chemicals got into our private wells.

I have a well at my home. I rely on my well water to provide cooking, drinking and bathing water.

In 2007, the power company began providing me bottled water. Before this, I had never heard of coal ash or its dangers and didn't know this toxin was being dumped in my community. If I had known about the dangers, I would have protested along with my community and this dumping would not have happened. But we didn't know of the dangers, or even that dumping was going on.

Thankfully, the power company did finally take responsibility for the situation by helping the community with these problems. But the contamination of the water remains. It should never have happened.

Because of the coal ash contamination, I have lost both my financial security and my health. My biggest monetary asset, my home, is worthless. I cannot afford to pay the mortgage and the bank has foreclosed on me. I may have to file for bankruptcy.

Because of the coal ash, I have trouble breathing. I am not a smoker. My doctor has told me I have the lungs of an 80 year old woman because of breathing in the coal ash. I am terrified about my future health. My husband died in 2006 from renal failure, and I worry that my organs will fail, I will get cancer or I will get another disease because of my exposure to this ash.

I also worry about my children and grandchildren. They drank the water, bathed in it, brushed their teeth and breath in this dust. Will they get a disease, too? No one can tell me for sure. But I do know they never should have been exposed to this stuff.

I ask that you pass legislation to protect people like me, and my family. If the Environmental Protection Agency had the authority to require liners and force power companies not to dump close to drinking water systems, what happened to me and my community would not happen to anyone else.

We do not have the power to protect ourselves these companies and the state agencies are not protecting us.

Coal ash contamination ruins the lives of the people in the community and our environment. It cannot be allowed to happen again. Thank you.