

Environmental Groups File Complaint over Coal Ash

CHICAGO (AP) — Several environmental groups want the Illinois Pollution Control Board to order Midwest Generation to clean up groundwater pollution that allegedly leached from coal-ash ponds at four of the company's power plants.

The Environmental Integrity Project and the Environmental Law & Policy Center filed a legal complaint with the board Wednesday on behalf of several environmental groups, alleging that groundwater at the utility's Joliet, Pekin, Romeoville and Waukegan plants is contaminated with toxic pollutants — such as arsenic, boron and selenium — in levels that exceed state and federal standards.

The complaint asks the board to order the company to stop open dumping of coal ash at those plants and to clean up groundwater.

"Our water is a precious resource that must be protected ... Midwest Generation owes it to these communities to close and clean up their leaking ash ponds expeditiously," Traci Barkley, a water resources scientist at Prairie Rivers Network, said in a written statement. The Illinois group Citizens Against Ruining the Environment also is involved in the complaint.

Midwest Generation issued a statement, saying the complaint did not appear to raise new issues.

"We will be prepared to defend our operations vigorously against parties who have long sought any avenue to try to close down coal-fired power plants," the company's statement said.

The company began monitoring groundwater around the coal-ash ponds in 2010, and tests of the wells showed the elevated levels of contaminants, including some toxins that can cause cancer and neurological problems, the complaint alleges.

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman Maggie Carson said no off-site drinking water wells have been affected by the pollution. The agency has sent violation notices to the utility; environmental groups filed the complaint as a way to have a voice in any decisions involving the pollution.

Ash generated by burning coal at the plants is dumped into large ponds to keep it from blowing away, but environmentalists say there aren't enough measures in place to ensure the pollutants in the ash don't migrate into groundwater.

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