

EPCAMR



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The Honorable Kathleen A. McGinty
Secretary
PA Department of Environmental Protection
Rachel Carson State Office Building
PO Box 2063
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2063

Dear Secretary McGinty:

I have recently had a chance to review a draft of the report entitled, "Coal Ash Beneficial Use in Mine Reclamation and Mine Drainage Remediation in Pennsylvania", prepared by the PA DEP and the Pennsylvania State University. The detailed and comprehensive analysis of the beneficial use of coal ash in PA will surely serve as a highly regarded technical report given the on-going debate and rhetoric about the value and beneficial use of combustion fluidized bed (CFB) by-products specific to abandoned mine reclamation projects.

As you are well aware, the Eastern PA Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR), is a non-profit organization that was created by representatives of the Conservation Districts encompassing sixteen eastern PA counties, the anthracite industry, watershed associations, sportsmen's groups, conservation clubs, co-generation facilities, and representatives from the general public. The mission of the Eastern Coalition is to encourage the reclamation and redevelopment of abandoned mine lands and remediation of waters affected by past practices of the mining industry in Eastern PA and to provide technical support to the community groups that have an interest in restoring their watersheds impacted by abandoned mine drainage.

An increasingly important role for EPCAMR has been to serve as a liaison between the local grassroots watershed organizations, private businesses, the mining industry, DEP, BAMR, OSM, EPA, and other state and federal agencies involved in abandoned mine land reclamation activities and acid mine drainage remediation. EPCAMR has also been actively involved in raising the awareness of the general public, our schools, and our elected officials on a local, state, federal, and national level regarding environmental issues related to abandoned mine land reclamation and abandoned mine drainage.

EPCAMR works to provide technical and administrative support to the Conservation Districts, coordinate reclamation activities, establish a public education outreach program within the schools, and to rejuvenate local watershed groups, primarily in those areas where streams are adversely affected by abandoned mine siltation and abandoned mine drainage. EPCAMR works together with nearly 75 local groups to inform and educate the public and to organize environmental interests relative to the purpose and value of specific reclamation, remining, and remediation techniques being proposed for sites in their local community.

EPCAMR has been engaged over the past several years in positive interactions and openness with the US EPA Region III, specifically, and the US Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining concerning the need for uniform national guidelines to address coal ash placement on abandoned mine lands.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) comprehensively regulates use of the ash in reclamation and soil amendments under the SMCRA of 1977; and no adverse impacts have been discovered despite a decade of monitoring. There are significant environmental benefits to be gained through the continued use of the coal ash in abandoned mine reclamation. The data collected by the US EPA has shown that combustion fluidized-bed (CFB) wastes do not meet the criteria of hazardous wastes, therefore do not warrant additional federal regulations under RCRA and are unnecessary, given the comprehensive oversight and rigid quality control that currently exists under state programs.

By burning waste coal for fuel, co-generation plants are also cleaning up abandoned mines sites and waste coal piles across PA. 15 States have created regulations and policies encouraging the beneficial use of fly-ash. As you know, waste coal sites seriously impact water quality, contribute to the formation of abandoned mine drainage (AMD) and threaten public health and safety. EPCAMR believes, in general, that the electric generating industries manage fossil fuel combustion waste in a responsible manner and the coal ash waste do not represent a significant hazard requiring more stringent regulation.

A byproduct of the combustion is an alkaline ash that Pennsylvania DEP has approved for use in reclamation programs for active and abandoned mines. The ash is returned to the site to neutralize other pyritic and acid bearing materials that could not be used as fuel, and to supplement native soils to promote site revegetation. The sites are backfilled, contoured, and vegetated. CFB material enhances the revegetation of the sites as a soil amendment with important agronomic benefits.

By reclaiming these sites, the electric power generating industry is also eliminating many potential safety and health hazards in the community. The abandoned waste sites pose the threat of accidental fires, and they are sometimes used as trash dumps or recreational areas for people using all-terrain vehicles. Sedimentation and erosion problems are also eliminated in areas where streams are located nearby. Data collected at many reclaimed sites indicate improvements in surface water quality and elimination of AMD. Reclaimed abandoned mine sites also help to reduce the surface infiltration of water in to the underground mine workings that eventually discharge into streams and rivers as AMD.

Potential closure of the co-generation plants would create adverse environmental and economic consequences for dozens of small communities across the state. The common beneficial use of ash from CFB combustion boilers from electric co-generation plants in PA serves as a vital component in the reclamation of abandoned mine sites in our State and it has made a meaningful contribution toward addressing this urgent environmental need in many coal field areas of PA. Deregulation of the electric utility industry over the next 10-15 is going to seriously hamper the amount of abandoned mine lands and culm banks that are currently being reclaimed. In the Anthracite Region, we can not thank some of our regional co-generation facilities enough for the great job they do in reclaiming abandoned mine lands. These private companies are not obstacles, they should be considered one of the greatest assets we have in our region.

Let us not forget that much of this work has been completed at no cost to the state or taxpayers. The backlog of reclamation needed for the nearly 250,000 acres is projected to cost more than \$3,000,000,000 in PA, and that only includes the Priority 1 and Priority 2 Sites. PA DEP estimates that it costs around \$20,000 to clean up just one acre of abandoned mine lands. To date, more than 2,300 acres have been cleaned up, saving PA residents nearly \$460,000,000. This estimate does not include the elimination of AMD that has detrimentally impacted our streams and rivers.

For example, in the Wyoming Valley, Luzerne County, PA, hundreds of acres of abandoned culm banks have literally disappeared. The once dirty, ominous, abandoned mine land features that have dominated the landscape for nearly eight decades and blocked the beautiful view of the Susquehanna River from the East side of the Valley from the West, have been reclaimed utilizing coal ash for abandoned mine reclamation. People can travel the local highways and Interstate I-81 and now see clear cross the Wyoming Valley. Northampton Generating Supply Company, separated the culm, hauled it away, brought back the ash, compacted in lifts on the same site in which it came from, filled the mine voids, and reclaimed the site. It was a win-win situation. In the land beneath these culm banks, there's economic and environmental value.

Within the culm banks, there is energy to be recycled, and in the continued removal of these eyesores, EPCAMR sees great satisfaction in the reclaimed aesthetic look for Northeastern PA and across the State of PA as a whole. We should concentrate our efforts on reclamation of these undeveloped acres for social, economic, as well as environmental uses. Expanding and reconnecting our communities separated by mountains of culm, creation of open space areas, wildlife habitat enhancement, water quality improvements, improving the areas quality of life, recreational opportunities, stream restoration, and economic development of these abandoned mine lands should be of the utmost importance.

EPCAMR believes that PA has ample and effective waste disposal and management regulations already in place. It is important that we continue to support private business and industry that successfully balance economic development with environmental protection. Innovative solutions to environmental problems should be applauded, not restricted, or overly regulated.

The reclamation of abandoned mine sites in the Anthracite Coal Fields of Northeastern PA and throughout the Western PA Bituminous Coal Fields is crucial to the restoration of the ecological values and water quality improvements in thousands of miles of streams and rivers in the Susquehanna, Delaware, and Ohio River watersheds. These efforts using CFB ash in the reclamation process are also key to the economic redevelopment and cultural recovery of the human conditions and communities that were adversely affected by the extractive history of the coal industry in the past.

EPCAMR agrees with the PA Joint Legislative Air & Water Pollution Control & Conservation Committee's recommendations, the most significant of which are as follows:

- continuing research into the effects of coal ash placement on abandoned mine lands;
- third party oversight of reclamation projects;
- studying the risks of not reclaiming hazards and threats posed by the legacy of past mining practices, and;
- providing public education on the beneficial use of coal combustion waste products.

This report completed by the PA Department of Environmental Protection, along with the Pennsylvania State University, lends great credibility for the beneficial use of coal ash and supports the position that PA is regulating the activity effectively, while ensuring that the opportunities for beneficial use are not disproportionately restricted. EPCAMR is also willing to provide materials on the beneficial use of coal combustion waste products for public education and outreach that are true, accurate, and based on factual information to community groups in our Region, including copies of this document.

EPCAMR understands that without clean water, land, and water, the social, recreational, economic, and environmental vitality of the Commonwealth will be severely disadvantaged for our future generations. PA should continue to be the true leader in the continuing efforts to research and implement remediation and reclamation techniques on abandoned mine lands. Other states should follow our lead.

EPCAMR is pleased to endorse this publication and intend to pass around copies of the completed report and make reference to it to the many watershed organizations and other abandoned mine reclamation supporters in the Northeast. This report should serve as the model for other states to set objective, unbiased, meaningful criteria for where coal ash can be utilized and placed as part of today's mineral resource extraction industry and abandoned mine reclamation processes in order to achieve the ultimate goal of land reclamation.

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the EPCAMR Board of Trustees,



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Roger Hornerberger, PA DEP MRM-DMO
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