Press Release

Jul 18, 2012

Markey Calls for Caution on Coal Ash Disposal in Mine Shafts, Mountaintop Recovery

Toxic Coal Waste Could Taint Water if Safety Rules Too Weak, Congressman Tells Interior Dept.

WASHINGTON (July 18, 2012) – Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) today called on the Department of Interior to ensure the protection of communities in their current consideration of the rules that will govern the potential disposal of coal ash in abandoned mine shafts and to fill and reshape mountaintops destroyed by mining operations. In a letter sent to Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Rep. Markey asks for documents related to the development of the rule to ensure that it is being done transparently and in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency and local communities that could be impacted by this potentially dangerous practice.

"Filling mine shafts and reshaping destroyed mountains with coal ash may temporarily hide these toxic waste products, but without the proper safeguards, there is no way to guarantee it won't eventually reach drinking water supplies or impact the air we breathe," said Rep. Markey. "The coal industry would like to say about coal ash 'out of sight, out of mind.' But without the proper protections, it will end up being 'out of sight, in our water.'"

Coal ash is a waste product from the combustion of coal in power plants. It contains some of the world's deadliest toxic metals such as arsenic, lead, mercury, cadmium, hexavalent chromium, and selenium. Coal companies have already started to dispose of coal ash in mine shafts and to "re-contour" lands destroyed by mountaintop removal mining. In many states, the use of coal ash is exempt from all regulations or restrictions, necessitating federal rules and guidelines that will ensure public health and the environment are protected.

In the letter to Secretary Salazar, Rep. Markey asks for documents related to the development of the rules that will protect communities from coal ash contamination through these disposal techniques.