

**Submission
No 22**

**INQUIRY INTO COSTS FOR REMEDIATION OF SITES
CONTAINING COAL ASH REPOSITORIES**

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This is a submission to the enquiry into toxic coal ash.

I am a retired public health doctor with over 40 years' experience of the practice of medicine. I am extremely concerned about the harm that coal ash does to people's health. People know about the toxic substances released into the atmosphere when coal is burnt and they increasingly know about the carbon dioxide emissions that are causing global warming. But most people are not aware of the harm that coal ash does to people's health - in fact, most don't even know what coal ash is. That is why this enquiry is so important for the health of the people of NSW, particularly those who live close to coal ash dumps and are exposed to the toxic effects. I very much hope that this enquiry will see the NSW government responding to this problem in a responsible manner that protects the health of the people of NSW and places responsibility for managing coal ash safely where it properly belongs - with the producers of coal ash.

I am sure that you have access to all the relevant scientific information about the harms done by coal ash not only to people but also to the environment. But just to summarise: At most coal-fired power stations in Australia, coal ash is mixed with saline wastewater and pumped into enormous dumps creating a lethal cocktail of toxic sludge including heavy metals and dangerous pollutants like mercury, lead, arsenic, selenium and chromium. These toxic chemicals leak into rivers and ground water and escape into the air creating air pollution. The toxins in coal ash have been linked to asthma, heart disease, cancer, respiratory diseases and stroke. Communities that live near coal-fired power stations are most at risk.

Regrettably, the companies responsible for producing and storing the coal ash have not been as diligent as they should be in ensuring the safety of local communities and there has not been adequate monitoring of coal ash dumps or the water and air pollution arising from them.

Following your careful investigation of the issues I encourage you to make recommendations along the following lines:

- 1 the NSW government should investigate the best way to clean up and remediate the dumps and ensure that public and private funds are made available for this to occur;
- 2 power stations owners must be made to implement stricter controls on the production and storage of coal ash. This must be carefully monitored and all results made public;
- 3 baseline studies of the true levels of pollution and of the health of surrounding communities should be conducted;
- 4 all information about the safety of and plans for the coal ash dumps should be made public.

Many thanks for considering my submission.