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## **New Report Reveals Toxics in Coal Combustion Waste in Alaska**

*Report details coal ash toxics that may pose significant health threat*

**Anchorage:** As the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers whether and how to regulate waste from coal plants, Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) issued a report today as a first step in identifying where Alaska fits into the debate. The report, *Our Health, Our Right to Know: A Report on Toxic Chemicals Found in Coal Combustion Waste in Alaska*, reveals high levels of heavy metals in coal combustion waste, also known as coal ash. The report came about after citizens came forward with local concerns about the use of coal ash in their neighborhoods.

Samples of coal ash throughout the Interior indicated levels of toxic chemicals found to be much higher than background soil samples from Fairbanks. Levels of arsenic and vanadium were found at concentrations that may harm human health. In some samples, mercury was found at levels 70 times higher than background soils, and at levels high enough to be a concern if inhaled in the form of windblown dust. Adverse health effects associated with exposure to arsenic, vanadium, and mercury include cancer, neurological problems, and developmental defects.

“This report is intended to be a starting point for more research and better handling of coal ash that puts public health first,” said Sarah Petras, the primary author of the report. “The results from our sampling project warrant further investigation of levels of hazardous chemicals from all sources of coal ash in the Fairbanks area. I was concerned to find in all samples levels of arsenic that were greater than the US EPA standard for residential soils – in some cases, more than 100 times higher. Arsenic is a well known cancer-causing agent, and we need to be sure that arsenic contamination from coal ash will not affect public health.”

Alaskans in the Interior deserve a complete understanding of what is in the coal ash. *Our Health, Our Right to Know* is a first look at how coal ash is dumped and handled with less regulation than household garbage. The problem with coal ash is that it may leach toxic heavy metals into waterways or by blowing dust off of piles, and thus pose risks to health and the environment.

“In April 2010, we found out that coal ash was being used as filler on an uphill adjacent lot in our subdivision. The ash is 330 feet from our three year old well and even closer to our garden,” said Ron Yarnell of Fairbanks. “We should not be the ones to have to pay to have toxic waste removed from our neighbor’s property uphill of ours. The fact that dumping this waste is allowed and not illegal is just wrong.”

The EPA is currently considering new regulations on coal combustion waste.

Read the full report here: [www.akaction.org](http://www.akaction.org)

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