

Citizens Against Longwall Mining would like the citizens of Hillsboro to see the following letter. This is written by a professional engineer with experience in mining practices. This letter was submitted as a letter to the editor, but the Hillsboro paper has not printed it.

Dear Editor:

I heard of an article about the construction of a coal waste slurry impoundment in the City of Hillsboro. I was a little taken aback when I saw your October 11 edition.

Coal waste slurry is an unusual material in that it does not drain, that is, it remains "flowable" and the "water" mentioned in news article can develop into a waste leachate, sometimes referred to by old miners as "yellow boy" or more recently as "coal puke" because of its sometimes orange-ish color. It can be seen at many abandoned mine sites in Illinois.

Coal waste slurry comes from the washing of the coal, which is a fairly new process. There haven't been any recent catastrophic failures of coal mine waste dams yet, though a large coal combustion waste dam did recently fail catastrophically. Most coal waste impoundments "fail" as the leachate seeps out of the impoundment, contaminating the groundwater and or surface water.

The placement of a liner in the impoundment does stop the leachate from leaking out. But with a liner, just covering a full impoundment with more coal waste or soil does not stop the infiltration of precipitation into the impoundment, so that the impoundment fills up like a bathtub. Eventually, the coal waste dam embankment becomes saturated and or the impoundment overflows.

With or without a liner, coal waste slurry impoundments fail in some manner and would occur long after the mining company has left town and recovered its bond. That is why permanent coal waste impoundments are explicitly not allowed under federal and State mining rules. Presumably State regulators clearly stated this at the Public Hearing held October 11.

New technologies are being developed to manage coal slurry waste in ways that are much more protective to human health, property and environment than the dumping and abandoning of liquid coal waste behind dams constructed of coal waste. An added benefit of these new waste management alternatives is the creation of many more local jobs.

Beyond that, why the City would even be considering the construction of huge permanent coal waste dam impoundments within its city limits is a little perplexing.

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This letter is printed by CALM as a public service.