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Bill to discourage out-of-state coal ash import clears major committee hurdle

Atlanta, GA--[SB 123](#) by Sen. William Ligon passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee today. The legislation would close a coal ash loophole that currently encourages out-of-state coal ash dumping in Georgia solid waste landfills. The bill would raise the surcharge that local governments can charge per ton of coal ash from \$1 to \$2.50, in line with the surcharge on regular household garbage.

"Loopholes for coal-fired power plants have turned Georgia into a dumping ground for toxic coal ash," said Jennette Gayer, director of Environment Georgia and chair of the Georgia Water Coalition's coal ash committee. "In the few days left in the legislative session we urge passage of SB 123, which will start addressing our coal ash import problem and give local governments much needed funds."

The Environment Protection Division (EPD) shares three years of coal ash landfill data on its website. The latest data shows that more than 4.5 million tons of coal ash have been dumped in Georgia landfills, and that number is increasing.

"Anything to deter the hundreds of trucks hauling coal ash into our community or any other community is desperately needed," said Tammy Purcell, a resident of Banks County, where the R&B landfill has taken in more than 2.7 million tons of coal ash in the last three years, mostly from out of state. "I thank the legislature for moving this legislation and hope they will do more to ensure our communities are protected from this toxin."

Coal ash is the waste left behind after burning coal and it is toxic--it can contain lead, selenium, arsenic and more. Beyond the out-of-state ash coming in, Georgia Power Company has over 90 million tons of coal ash, which has been stored in unlined pits around the company's coal-fired power plants. These pits are unlined, and [recent research indicates that the toxins in coal ash are leaking into the well water of nearby communities and triggering serious health problems](#). Unfortunately, Georgia Power does not plan to line these coal ash pits that will permanently be left in our groundwater, and which will likely lead to future contamination.

Three coal ash bills that would address Georgia Power's coal ash have yet to receive a committee hearing in the Senate:

- HB 93 which would require Georgia Power to notify communities when they drain water out of their coal ash ponds.
- HB 929 which will require long-term monitoring of groundwater around coal ash ponds, to make sure the toxins aren't posing a threat to our communities.
- HB 959 (a companion bill to SB 123) which will close a loophole created in 2018 that encourages the importation of out-of-state coal ash.

Unfortunately, none of these bills require liners on any facilities storing coal ash. Liners were specifically requested by residents of Juliette, GA that visited the Capitol and shared details of the high level of coal ash toxins found in their drinking water.

“This issue is life and death in Juliette,” said Angela Marlow, a Juliette resident and member of the Middle Georgia Clean Water Alliance. “Without support from the Georgia legislature contamination of our water will continue.”

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*The **Georgia Water Coalition** is a consortium of more than 260 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations that have been working to protect Georgia’s water since 2002. www.gawater.org*