

HEARTLAND COALFIELD ALLIANCE



March 2012

SELLING COAL IN THE CLASSROOM

The education of our children is a sacred trust that we give to our teachers. Yet, educators in Illinois are being asked to violate that trust for the economic gain and vested interests of the coal industry.

Last year a New York Times editorial sharply criticized educational publisher Scholastic for distributing a poster funded by the American Coal Foundation that gave a one-sided view of coal usage.^[1] Educators and child advocacy organizations across the nation immediately voiced their strong objections to ostensibly objective and responsible institutions disseminating educational curricula that are inaccurate, biased and ultimately harmful to students. Ultimately, Scholastic agreed – after receiving comments from 60,000 concerned parents and educators, Scholastic withdrew the curriculum, stating that “... the mere fact of (industry) sponsorship may call into question the authenticity of the information....”^[2]

Shortly after the Scholastic debacle, the Heartland Coalfield Alliance obtained a copy of “[From the Coal Mines to the Power Lines](#)”, a taxpayer supported curriculum developed by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to teach elementary and high school students that coal is the clean, safe fuel of the future. To put it lightly, we were appalled to find that the State of Illinois is distributing a full teachers' curriculum and on-line materials that offer a one-sided, inaccurate, and willfully distorted view of coal, clearly written on behalf of the coal industry. Virtually no mention is made of coal's liabilities, of the environmental damage that is unavoidable in its extraction and use, nor of its documented social and environmental costs. Taken as a whole, it is a highly biased program aimed at casting coal and coal companies in the most positive light possible and encouraging public allegiance to the coal industry, beginning with the youngest and most impressionable members of society – our children.

Within the curriculum, children are taught to create commercials promoting coal, that environmental regulations will significantly raise the cost of producing electricity and that the evidence is not clear that the combustion of fossil fuels has led to a warming climate. In highlighting the attributes of coal, the curriculum skillfully ignores or glosses over the enormous social and environmental costs associated with a “clean coal” economy.

The coal curriculum fails to live up to Illinois Learning Standards for Science, which require that students be able to know and apply concepts that describe the interaction between science, technology and society in historical and contemporary contexts. Here is tiny fraction of the current scientific consensus about coal's public health and environmental impacts that you *won't* find in the DCEO's coal curriculum:



Toxic Coal Slurry, Shay #1 Mine
Carlinville, Illinois



Int'l Day of Climate Action, Chicago
(Photo by Kyle Miskell)

- The entire coal life cycle— including extraction, transportation, burning, and disposal - has devastating impacts on human health.[3] The externalized annual costs of coal and its associated waste streams have been estimated at one third to one half a trillion dollars.[4]
- In Illinois, emissions from coal-fired power plants are responsible for 621 premature deaths and 1,018 heart attacks every year. [5]
- The burning of fossil fuels is the single greatest contributor of CO₂ emissions and coal-fired power plants account for nearly one third of these emissions in the U.S.[6]
- Groundwater contamination from coal ash disposal has been documented at dozens of sites across the country. [7], [8], [9]
- Nearly 1000 miles of streams in Illinois are considered impaired for either public drinking water supply or aquatic life due to impacts from mining activities. [10]

CAMPAIGN FOR SCIENCE-BASED ENERGY EDUCATION

The Heartland Coalfield Alliance is a state-wide alliance of community and environmental organizations working to educate residents about the full array of impacts associated with a dependence on coal as a primary fuel source and to promote a gradual transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to one reliant on conservation, efficiency and clean, safe renewable energy sources.

We are asking you to join us in calling upon the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to stop mis-informing our kids about coal and to support economic measures that will build a clean energy future for our children.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY!

Call Governor Quinn's office at (217) 782-0244. Tell him, "Stop misleading our children about coal."

Write Governor Quinn at: Office of the Governor, 207 State House, Springfield, IL 62706.

Join the Heartland Coalfield Alliance campaign for science-based energy education! Contact:

Lan Richart, Eco-Justice Collaborative
773.556.3418 or lrichart@ecojusticecollaborative.org

Brian Perbix, Prairie Rivers Network
217.720.9289 or bperbix@prairierivers.org

Tell your colleagues and friends about the campaign.

Stay informed at: www.heartlandcoalfieldalliance.org.

ENDNOTES

[1] "Scholastic's Big Coal Mistake," New York Times, May 12th, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/13/opinion/13fri4.html?_r=1&ref=opinion.

[2] "Scholastic Releases Statement on Coal Foundation Curriculum", Publishers Weekly, May 13th, 2011, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/47211-scholasticreleases-statement-on-coal-foundation-curriculum.html>.

[3] Physicians for Social Responsibility, "Coal's Assault on Human Health", 2009, <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/coals-assault-executive.pdf>.

[4] Paul R. Epstein et al. 2011. Full cost accounting for the life cycle of coal in "Ecological Economics Reviews." Robert Costanza, Karin Limburg & Ida Kubiszewski, Eds. Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci. 1219: 73–98.

[5] Clean Air Task Force, 2010. The Toll From Coal: An Updated Assessment of Death and Disease from America's Dirtiest Energy Source <http://www.catf.us/resources/publications/view/138>.

[6] Environmental Protection Agency, Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gs Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2009, 2011. <http://epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/usinventoryreport.html>.

[7] Environmental Integrity Project and Prairie Rivers Network, "Illinois at Risk: Lax safeguards and no enforcement endanger the water, air & lives of residents near coal ash dumps", 2011, <http://prairierivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Illinois-at-Risk1.pdf>.

[8] Physicians for Social Responsibility, "Coal Ash: The Toxic Threat to Our Health and Environment", 2010, <http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/coal-ash.pdf>.

[9] Environmental Integrity Project, Earthjustice and Sierra Club, "In Harm's Way: Lack Of Federal Coal Ash Regulations Endangers Americans And Their Environment", 2010, http://www.environmentalintegrity.org/news_reports/documents/INHARMSWAY_FINAL3.pdf.

[10] Illinois EPA, 2011. Illinois Integrated Water Quality Report and Section 303(d) List - 2010: Water Resource Assessment Information and Listing of Impaired Waters, Vol. 1. Surface Water. Draft Report <http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/tmdl/303d-list.html>.