FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 1, 2011

Contacts:
Lisa Evans, Earthjustice, (781) 631-4119, levans@earthjustice.org
Barbara Gottlieb, Physicians for Social Responsibility,(202) 587-5225, bgottlieb@psr.org
Patrick Mitchell, Environmental Integrity Project, (703) 276 3266,
pmitchell@hastingsgroup.com
Chris Borello, Concerned Citizens of Lake Township, (330)-499-5207
Ginny Cramer, Sierra Club, (804) 225-9113ext. 102

Cancer-Causing Chemical in the Water: New Report Details Risk in Ohio

Coal ash waste contains hexavalent chromium

Washington, D.C. – Just weeks after recent headlines about hexavalent chromium, a cancer-causing toxic chemical, contaminated drinking water systems around the U.S., a new report shows that scores of leaking coal ash sites across the country are additional documented sites for such contamination.

Hexavalent chromium first made headlines after Erin Brockovich sued Pacific Gas & Electric because of poisoned drinking water from hexavalent chromium. Now new information indicates that the chemical leaks readily from leaking coal ash dump sites maintained for coal-fired power plants.

Public interest law firm Earthjustice, Physicians for Social Responsibility and Environmental Integrity Project released the report on the eve of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing recognizing the hazards of hexavalent chromium exposure at which U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson will testify.

Among the leaking coal ash sites listed in the report are the Industrial Excess Landfill in Uniontown and the Conesville Fixed FGD Sludge Landfill in Coshocton County, OH. The Industrial Excess Landfill, a Superfund site surrounded on three sides by residential neighborhoods, poses a special risk. Roughly one million tons of coal ash were dumped there in the 1960s and groundwater monitoring has shown chromium concentrations to be increasing to very dangerous levels in wells around the landfill. Chromium was found at up to 1,680 ppb in off-site wells located in or near residential areas -- over 15 times the federal drinking water standard. At that level the cancer risk is greater than 1 in 50.

Ohio ranks first in the nation for chromium and chromium compound releases from electric utilities. According to EPA's latest data, electric utilities in Ohio disposed or otherwise released over 1 million pounds of chromium and chromium compounds in 2009, primarily to unlined landfills and surface impoundments. Notably, Ohio is also home to the third and fourth largest chromium-releasing power plants in the nation- the AEP Gavin Plant in Cheshire and the J.M. Stuart plant in Manchester. Because most ponds and landfills are unlined at Ohio's 23 coal-fired power plants, communities near

those plants may be threatened by releases of the cancer-causing chemical into groundwater.

“Not only did the U.S. EPA allow polluting corporations to stop monitoring the Uniontown IEL Superfund Site groundwater for such dangerous metals over five years ago, the agency permitted the permanent sealing of 33 test wells out of some 50 surrounding the landfill,” said Concerned Citizens of Lake Township group leader Chris Borello. “In light of this important national report being released today, citizens renew their call for EPA to reverse both decisions immediately to reinstate proper monitoring around this site.”

“Communities near coal ash sites must add hexavalent chromium to the list of toxic chemicals that threaten their health and families,” said Lisa Evans, senior administrative counsel at Earthjustice. “It is now abundantly clear that EPA must control coal ash disposal to prevent the poisoning of our drinking water with hexavalent chromium.”

Coal ash, the leftover waste from power plants, contains arsenic, lead, cadmium, mercury, selenium and many other chemicals that can cause cancer and damage the nervous system and organs, especially in children. Hexavalent chromium is a highly toxic carcinogen when inhaled, and recent studies from the National Toxicology Program indicate that when leaked into drinking water, it can also cause cancer.

“The cancer risk from hexavalent chromium is one more serious threat to health from coal ash,” said Barbara Gottlieb, Deputy Director for Environment & Health at Physicians for Social Responsibility. "To protect the public from carcinogens and other dangerous substances, the EPA needs to regulate coal ash as a hazardous waste.”

“Studies by EPA, the state of California, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry show that ingesting minute amounts of hexavalent chromium increases the risk of cancer. Coal ash dumps have contaminated groundwater with much higher concentrations of this deadly carcinogen, according to the industry’s own monitoring data,” said Eric Schaeffer, executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project. “The Obama Administration should keep its promise to respect science and protect the public’s health, by putting strict standards in place to keep this contamination from spreading even further.”

“The pollution from coal ash sites is making people sick,” said Mackenzie Bailey the Sierra Club’s Coal to Clean Energy Campaign Representative in Ohio, “We cannot trust big polluters to limit pollution on their own. We need the EPA to hold them accountable.”

Among the findings from the new report:

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that the type of chromium that leaches from coal ash sites is nearly always of the hexavalent variety, which is the most toxic form of chromium.
- The threat of hexavalent chromium drinking water contamination is present at hundreds of unlined coal ash sites across the country.

- At least 28 coal ash sites in 17 states have already released chromium to groundwater at levels exceeding by thousands of times a proposed drinking water goal for hexavalent chromium.
- Power plants dump more than 10 million pounds of chromium and chromium compounds into mostly unlined or inadequately lined coal ash landfills, ponds and fill sites each year. The electric power industry is the largest single source of chromium and chromium compounds released to the environment.
- The U.S. Department of Energy and electric utility industry have known for years about the aggressive leaking of hexavalent chromium from coal ash.
- Hexavalent chromium contamination from coal ash is clearly a grave threat. Yet the U.S. EPA, which is currently in the process of deciding whether or not to regulate coal ash as a hazardous waste, has completely ignored the cancer risk from chromium in groundwater.

###