

# Protecting Our Water from Power Plant Pollution



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**Belews Lake**

**Coal ash is one of the waste byproducts of burning coal for electricity.** It contains several toxic contaminants, including arsenic, chromium, mercury, and selenium. Coal ash is often mixed with water and placed into big open pits, held back by earthen dams.

The Belews Creek Station has one active coal ash pond which spans 342 acres with a holding capacity of over four billion gallons. This pond is almost 40 years old. The plant also has several dry ash landfills and other coal waste ponds.

The N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have deemed the pond "high hazard," meaning its dam failure is likely to cause loss of human life.

## Groundwater Pollution

Over the past two years, monitoring of groundwater near the coal ash ponds at the Belews Creek plant has shown levels of heavy metals that exceed state groundwater standards, including:

- chromium at 50% over limits
- iron at 4600% over limits
- manganese at 7100% over limits

## Polluting Belews Lake

Any facility that discharges wastewater into United States waters needs a Clean Water Act permit to do so. The rules regarding these permits have not been updated for over 30 years. While there are limits for selenium, there are no limits for most other heavy metals like arsenic and chromium.

**\*Info from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Toxic Release Inventory. [www.epa.gov/tri/](http://www.epa.gov/tri/)**

## Belews Creek Steam Station Surface Water Discharges into Belews Lake, 2011\*

Chemical Compounds	Amount (lbs.)
Arsenic	74
Barium	2,810
Cobalt	12,100
Nickel	97
Selenium	112
Vanadium	276

# And Protecting Human Health

## Health Impacts

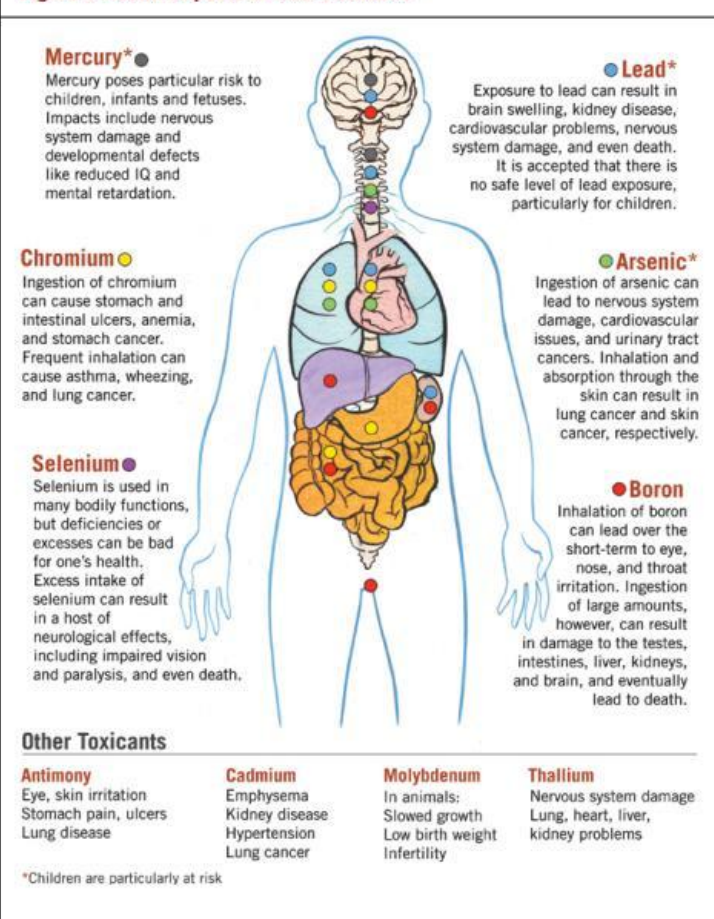
According to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency peer-reviewed study, people with well water contaminated by arsenic living near coal ash ponds have as much as a 1 in 50 chance of getting cancer; arsenic is one of the most common pollutants in coal ash. This risk is 2,000 times greater than the EPA's goal for reducing cancer risk to 1 in 100,000.

## Your Voice Can Make A Difference

The EPA is reviewing guidelines for wastewater discharge and the storage of coal ash waste. The voices of those who live near coal-fired power plants or recreate in waters impacted by coal waste are important for making sure that standards are protective of human health and the environment.

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Figure 1. Health Impacts of Coal Toxicants



\*Image courtesy of Physicians for Social Responsibility