

The WMEAC Finds A Surprise In The Great Lakes: Coal Fly Ash

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If there is one thing that seems to make *everything* dirty, its coal.

Based on findings from the West Michigan Environmental Action Council, 8 out of 21 surface water samples taken from all five of the great lakes found a significant level of coal fly ash, the hazardous waste that is left over when coal is burned for electricity -- which was something they did *not* plan to find.

In January of this year, the WMEAC did a study to measure the amount of *microplastics* in all five of the great lakes. In a sample of 20 out of their 21 surface water samples, plastics were found in the water, with the most significant amount found in Lake Erie where 600,000 pieces of microplastic were found per square kilometer.

But after further analysis, with the help of an electron microscope, they found that 20% of the round shaped plastics were actually coal fly ash. Due to their similar shape, this was not noticed at first, but now the WMEAC has some more questions to consider. Taken directly from their post about the findings, the WMEAC is now asking, “Just how much coal ash is in the Great Lakes?”, “where is it present and how does it move?” and “what impact does it have on human and environmental health?”

These are all very important questions considering what is actually in coal fly ash. “According to the EPA, fly ash can contain toxic substances like mercury, lead, vanadium, selenium, and arsenic.”

metals may cause developmental disabilities in fetuses and children. Selenium can also cause mutations in fish.

Finally, Clean Water Action has reported that 2 to 5% of coal ash is released into the atmosphere annually, resulting in millions of tons entering the water cycle each year. Coal ash can also directly enter the watershed rather than being burned in the air. In total, the EPA estimates that “U.S. power plants produce 140 million tons of coal ash annually - more toxic waste than any other industry.”

The question I feel the need to ask now is: must we wait until the shocking effects of this pollution ruins our water supplies, fisheries, and ultimately our own health until we make dramatic changes? Beyond Coal thinks not, and we appreciate all the support we receive to keep our air, water and health the first priority, over money.

[Links to related articles](#)

[Clean Water Fund - Toxic Trash Exposed](#)

[WMEAC - Just How Much Coal Ash Is In the Great Lakes?](#)

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