



September 14, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary, Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

The people of Central Appalachia need your help. Those who live near large surface coal mines, including mountaintop-removal mines, are dying from diseases linked to these large mines. Dozens of studies from the past two decades found higher rates of heart and lung disease, various cancers, birth defects (26% higher rates), etc., inflicted on people who live near surface coal mines. These studies documented that various toxic substances released by coal mining are linked to adverse health effects. The coal industry attacked both the researchers and the results of the studies.

While these studies are relatively recent, in 1974 Congress found that as a consequence of the hazardous environment associated with surface mining of coal, "the health and safety of people living and working near coal mines of the region are in more or less constant peril." In 1977 President Carter signed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act into law even though it was not as protective as President Carter thought was needed. Congress decided the first purpose of the new law is to "protect society and the environment from the adverse effects of surface coal mining operations."

When West Virginia secretaries for Health and Environmental Protection asked the federal government for help, President Obama's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) took action. In 2016 OSMRE funded a cooperative agreement for the "National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Study of Potential Health Risks Related to Surface Coal Mining in Central Appalachia." That study was partially completed when the Trump administration suspended and then canceled it in 2017. At first, Trump's DOI claimed it was reviewing all grants and cooperative agreements that exceeded \$100,000. DOI proved this claim to be false. DOI did not review any other existing grant or agreement and, without review, issued dozens more grants and cooperative agreements that exceeded \$100,000.

Many members of Congress protested. Representative Grijalva asked the Inspector General, Department of the Interior, to investigate. The IG found there was no evaluation of grants and agreements of \$100,000 or more. See: [Inspector General's response letter](#) to Representative Grijalva (2018).

This is where you can help. The undersigned organizations and individuals are requesting that you please direct OSMRE and DOI to work with the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to complete the study. People need to know if coal mining is poisoning them. The coal industry needs to know if they are killing people. And state regulators and OSMRE need to know if they need to do more to protect people. DOI also needs to know because OSMRE is the regulator of coal mining in Tennessee and oversees all state regulators.

Completion of the study is more critical than ever. More than a quarter million acres of active surface mining permits have been issued in these states, with more than 60,000 acres where coal is actively being removed. In addition, more than 11,000 “inactive” acres and 30,000 “not started” acres could become active whenever the coal companies decide to do so. People living in these regions have a right to know if coal mining is affecting their health. We need your help!

We appreciate your time and attention. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cc: Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior

Glenda Owens, Deputy Director, OSMRE

Steve Feldgus, Deputy Assistant Secretary

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