

## Danville town hall sees support for moving coal ash away from river

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DANVILLE — Urbana resident Eileen Borgia kayaked the Middle Fork River on Sunday for the first time this year.

She said she saw areas along the national scenic river upstream from Kickapoo State Park where she believes contaminants from coal-ash pits on the property of a former coal-fired power plant owned by Houston-based Dynegy are seeping into the river.

"I'm really concerned about it," said Borgia, who's floated the river for several years now. "It appears to me it seems to be expanding — the length."

Borgia was one of more than 40 people at a public meeting Monday night at Danville Area Community College, along with state Rep. Chad Hays, R-Catlin, state Sen. Scott Bennett, D-Champaign, and Danville Mayor Scott Eisenhauer, to discuss Dynegy's three pits.

The pits, adjacent to the Middle Fork, contain millions of cubic yards of coal ash — material left over from the coal-burning process that contains contaminants, like lead, mercury and cadmium and that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says can pollute waterways, groundwater, drinking water and the air without proper management.

Local activists Pam and Lan Richart of Champaign have been leading a grassroots campaign to pressure the energy company to move the pits away from the river. Dynegy, which closed its Vermilion Power Station in 2011, has been negotiating with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency on a closure plan for the site.

The Richarts, who formed Eco-Justice Collaborative in 2008 to protect the river, and other concerned citizens maintain that contaminants are already leaching into the river from the coal-ash ponds and the only solution is to move the ash away from the river. Dynegy wants to cap the ponds.

Eisenhauer told those at Monday's meeting that he absolutely supports moving the ash and believes now is the time to hold Dynegy accountable.

Some residents told the elected officials present that the state needs to be more aggressive with Dynegy, possibly pursuing litigation in an effort to protect the river and taxpayers so state and local governments won't be responsible for cleanup if the worst happens and the ash ponds fail and release their contents into the river.

Hays, who was in communication with IEPA officials Monday, told the audience that the state agency is working with Dynegy on a closure plan for the site and moving the ash away from the river is absolutely an option.

He said the IEPA is also going to require several rounds of groundwater testing, and that data will be critical in the negotiations with Dynegy. He said moving the ash is the best option, and he and local officials have told the IEPA director how serious of a

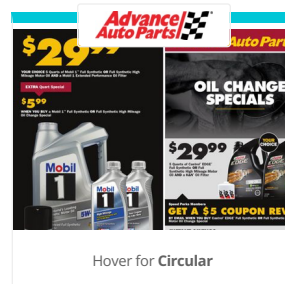
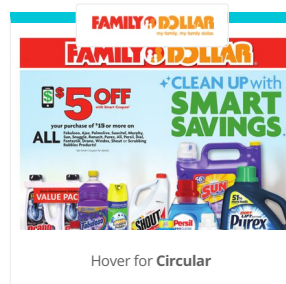
concern this is and that it's not only an environmental concern but also a quality-of-life issue.

Bennett said he's received hundreds of letters this spring from constituents, and some out of his district, who are concerned about the issue. He said it's not a partisan issue and he has questioned the IEPA director about it at budget meetings.

Borgia encouraged those in attendance to communicate to others in Vermilion County and get more involved in voicing their concerns, because that's what would be most effective in pressuring Dynegy to move the ash away from the river.



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