For decades, Illinoisans have joined millions of Americans in demanding a change to the status quo that let polluters put their profits before the health of our communities. 2015 was the year we finally got that, with historic public health protections, including the Clean Power Plan’s first-ever protections against dangerous carbon pollution from power plants, steps to cut toxic smog pollution, safeguards from coal ash, and steps to reform the federal coal leasing program. These protections save money and they save lives, including here in Illinois.

However, this year, Senators Durbin and Kirk will face a crucial choice: they can help lock in the incredible recent progress our nation has made to protect the health of our families from pollution or they can open the door to let fossil fuel billionaires erase those victories and launch new assaults on clean air, clean water, the health of our communities, and our job-creating clean energy economy.

Polluter-backed leaders in Congress have threatened to roll back progress on critical public health protections on issues like:

**CARBON POLLUTION**
Carbon pollution is the main contributor to climate disruption, making extreme weather worse—including more severe floods, widespread wildfires and record drought. It is also linked to life-threatening air pollution—such as the smog that can trigger asthma attacks. More often than not, the power plants spewing dangerous carbon pollution also have a disproportionately negative effect on low-income communities and communities of color already suffering from the worst effects of toxic pollution, including heart attacks, asthma, and premature death.

On August 2, 2015, the EPA finalized the first-ever carbon pollution protections, which will limit the amount of carbon pollution that power plants can dump into our air. These safeguards require energy companies to reduce their carbon pollution using technological innovation or to transition to cleaner sources of energy.

Coal and gas-fired power plants emit more than 2.3 billion metric tons per year of carbon pollution, approximately 40% of total U.S. energy-related carbon pollution. By establishing these strong carbon pollution protections under the Clean Power Plan, the EPA has given states a framework to clean up and modernize the way we power
our country. Now the states are in the driver’s seat to use EPA’s framework to come up with their own plans to move the towards 100% clean energy.

Despite the Supreme Court’s temporary hold (or “stay”) of the Clean Power Plan until the courts make a full decision (potentially as early as this Summer), we expect the the court to uphold the Clean Power Plan which will likely mean states need to submit state implementation plans by 2018 and begin complying with the standards by 2022. Therefore many states are continuing to plan for compliance while the Clean Power Plan goes through the legal process. We urge states to come up with their best implementation which will reduce carbon pollution which will not only help stop the climate crisis, but will also improve public health and grow the state’s clean energy economy.

SMOG POLLUTION

Ground-level ozone, or smog pollution, is a widespread public health threat affecting millions of Americans. Exposure to smog can cause asthma and heart attacks, worsen respiratory problems, and even lead to premature death. Children, seniors and people with breathing ailments like asthma are at particular risk from smog pollution. Socioeconomic factors such as lack of access to insurance and adequate health-care, poverty, lack of patient education, and proximity to polluting facilities compound the problem for many low income families and communities of color.

In October 2015, EPA updated the standard to 70 parts per billion (ppb). This new level, while not as stringent as it could have been based on the latest science, is a step in the right direction that will better protect public health.

TOXIC WATER POLLUTION

Every year, the nation’s coal plants produce 140 million tons of coal ash pollution, the toxic byproduct that is left over after the coal is burned, and dumped in the backyards of power plants across the nation into open pits. Coal ash pollution contains high levels of toxic heavy metals, such as arsenic, lead, selenium, and other cancer causing agents. The public health hazards and environmental threats to nearby communities from unsafe coal ash dumping have been known for many years and include increased risk of cancer, learning disabilities, neurological disorders, birth defects, reproductive failure, asthma, and other illnesses. Living near a wet coal ash storage pond is significantly more dangerous than smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, according to a risk assessment done by the EPA. In fact, people living within 1 mile of unlined coal ash ponds can have a 1 in 50 risk of cancer—more than 2,000 times higher than what the EPA considers acceptable. Last December, the EPA finalized the first-ever protections for the disposal

ILLINOISANS TOOK A STAND IN 2015

- 63% of Illinois voters have reached the consensus that climate change is a serious problem, with 38% of those saying that it is a “very serious” problem9
- An overwhelming 70% of Illinois voters favor the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Power Plan10
- 7/10 Illinois voters say they trust the scientists at the U.S. EPA more than members of Congress to decide whether there should be limits on air and water pollution11
- 5,103 Sierra Club members in IL took action to support a stronger smog standard
- 4,304 Sierra Club members in IL took action to support the Clean Power Plan
- 3,184 Sierra Club members in IL took action to support stronger coal ash standards
- 1,415 Sierra Club members in IL took action to oppose the pro-polluter agenda in Congress
- Last year, 218 Sierra Club members in Illinois took action to oppose efforts to overturn the Clean Power Plan.12
- A 2015 survey found that three-in-four Americans (76%) now believe that “global climate change” is occurring, up from 68% in 201413
- 74% of American adults think “global climate change” is either a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem14
- 69% of Americans support the country signing an international agreement limiting greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of coal, natural gas and petroleum15
- By a two-to-one margin, American voters favor the final version of the Clean Power Plan; fully 60% of voters say they support the plan, while just 31% oppose it16
- Young voters are particularly supportive; 70% of voters 18 to 35 years old support the CPP17
- 70% of voters want their states to cooperate and their own governors to develop a plan for their state to implement the new standards while just 17% do not18
- Voters are more likely to support politicians who back environmental safeguards. Nearly seven in ten voters (68%) report they are more likely to vote for a member of Congress “who supports environmental safeguards such as the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act”19
- 73% of American voters favor the U.S. EPA setting stricter limits on the amount of ozone pollution (or “smog”) that power plants, oil refineries and other industrial facilities can release20
of coal ash. While they do not go far enough, we need to make sure these standards are enforced.

Additionally, in September 2015, the EPA announced updated safeguards that will control the amount of toxic heavy metal pollution coal-fired power plants can dump into our waterways. Previous weak national Effluent Limitation Guidelines were over three decades old and allowed coal-fired power plants to release billions of pounds of contaminated wastewater directly into our rivers, lakes, and bays every year. Nearly 40 percent of all coal plants discharge toxic pollution within five miles of a downstream community’s drinking water intake. Coal plant wastewater has contaminated more than 23,000 miles of waterways, including nearly 400 water bodies used as drinking water sources.

These new standards are among the most effective the EPA could have implemented to protect the drinking water for millions of families from toxic wastewater from coal-fired power plants. These standards will eliminate most ash-contaminated wastewater releases and require rigorous treatment requirements for scrubber sludge, reducing toxic pollution by 1.4 billion pounds a year.

**FEDERAL COAL LEASING**

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced that the Obama Administration will be compiling a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on coal leasing on public lands and putting an immediate suspension on all future and modified coal leases. Secretary Jewell’s announcement today follows President Obama’s statement in the State of the Union that he would “push to change the way we manage our oil and coal resources, so that they better reflect the costs they impose on taxpayers and our planet.”

In reforming the federal coal leasing program and accounting for the full cost of coal on our health and our climate, President Obama and Secretary Jewell are saying that the American people no longer have to pay for this outdated, dysfunctional, and destructive program with their health or their wallets. This will be the first Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on federal coal leasing in decades and will be a step forward in fixing a broken and outdated system. More importantly, this reform marks the first time that the U.S. will examine the collective climate impacts from all coal mined from public lands. The last federal coal leasing reform was conducted in 1979. Clearly, in 1979 we knew only a fraction of what we do now about the devastating harm coal causes to our climate, air, land, water, and our health. Forty percent of all coal produced in the United States comes from our public lands. Immediately suspending all new and modified coal leases ensures that our federal public lands stay wild and unscathed from the dangers of coal mining.

**CONGRESS SHOULD PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH, NOT POLLUTING INDUSTRIES’ PROFITS**

Senators Durbin and Kirk should represent the interests of their constituents, not coal and oil corporations, by voting against support for dirty fuels and attacks on public health protections and clean energy. We need the government to do what we cannot do individually—protect us from pollution and polluters who are only motivated by higher profits and their bottom line.

Strong protections to curb life-threatening pollution help us improve the lives of millions of Americans and clean up our air, water, and environment. We can make the world safer and healthier for our children and families.

Urge Senators Durbin and Kirk to vote against attacks on public health protection at sc.org/LockInProgress.

ENDNOTES
2 Ibid
4 Ibid
5 http://earthjustice.org/features/map-coal-ash
6 Ibid
7 Data on permit limits and discharges is drawn from EPA’s ECHO database and other permitting documents. Plants which have retired, or which will shortly retire, are not included in these figures.
8 https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/06/fact-sheet-what
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