

Letter to the Editor



Environment Protection Authority
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Re: Article in *The Guardian* – *Dirty coal: health fears of a town covered in dust from disused power station*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/aug/14/dirty-coal-health-fears-of-a-town-covered-in-dust-from-disused-power-station>

I wish to clarify a number of issues raised in the Guardian's article "Dirty coal: health fears of a town covered in dust from disused power station".

It is incorrect to assert that coal ash dust has been 'blowing across Port Augusta' for two years. A major dust incident occurred on New Year's Day 2017 and light grey-coloured coal ash dust was found to have impacted across the township.

Within weeks of that incident, the ash dam was covered with a chemical dust suppressant to prevent further dust lift off.

The chemical suppressant remained in place while the longer-term rehabilitation of the site began, and the site was progressively covered in topsoil. The entire site is now covered and any dust impacts from the site are from topsoil, not ash.

The EPA has periodically tested dust samples, with the most recent samples confirming topsoil. Those results are publicly available on the EPA website and the results were assessed by SA Health public health specialists.

Any dust, from any source, can pose a risk to health. SA Health has produced a number of 'dust and your health' fact sheets and provided these at a community information forum in Port Augusta in 2017, as well as making them available on the EPA and SA health websites.

Port Augusta is in an arid area and frequently experiences dusty conditions, with dust raised from surrounding land. Dust from the site only impacts on the town when the wind is above a certain speed and is from a southerly direction. The EPA has a network of air quality monitoring equipment in Port Augusta and around South Australia, and can identify when the rehabilitation site is the likely source, and when dust is more general; dust events involving the rehabilitation site are reported on the EPA's website, along with live monitoring data.

The rehabilitation approach has been carefully selected from a number of options and is considered to be the most effective and appropriate given the Port Augusta site. The EPA has ensured, and will continue to ensure, that measures are taken by Flinders Power to ensure that the long term and sustainable vegetation cap is established as soon as possible, and in the meantime, that all reasonable and practicable steps are taken to minimise dust lift off during windy conditions.

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