

Testimony of John Stefanko

Executive Deputy Secretary for Programs

Department of Environmental Protection

Good morning. I am John Stefanko, Executive Deputy Secretary for Programs for the Department of Environmental Protection. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important subject.

The Commonwealth has a long history of coal mining. One consequence of that long mining history is the large number of abandoned mines and coal refuse sites scattered across the state's bituminous and Anthracite coal fields. These abandoned sites are pollution sources that can adversely impact surface and ground water. They can also present significant safety hazards to local communities.

DEP has carefully planned expenditures of its mine reclamation funding. And, the agency has developed an extensive list of incentives to encourage the re-mining of abandoned mine land by private companies as an alternative to developing new mines. The re-mining of old abandoned mine sites – using present-day environmental management techniques and controls, such as contemporaneous reclamation, acid mine drainage prediction and other compliance assistance

techniques – results in considerable abandoned mine reclamation and pollution abatement at no cost to the Commonwealth. Remining incentives include a program that provides the opportunity for reclaiming abandoned mine land with preexisting discharges. Under this program, mining companies can avoid water treatment liability where remining, and associated reclamation, results in water quality improvements. In 1992, Pennsylvania enacted incentives to encourage reclamation of abandoned mine lands through remining by providing permit application assistance, remining financial guarantees and reclamation bond credits.

Also in 1992, Pennsylvania created a contract reclamation program to allow for the limited recovery of coal from waste piles where the coal removal was necessary to complete reclamation. The value of the recovered coal is used to pay for the reclamation. The program was expanded in 1999 to include other abandoned coal mine land. In 1999 Pennsylvania enacted the Environmental Good Samaritan Act to encourage volunteers to improve land and water adversely affected by mineral extraction by limiting the Good Samaritan's potential liability. Forty-eight projects, focused mainly on mine drainage, but also including coal refuse, have been undertaken.

Today's Committee Hearing is focused on the benefits of reprocessing and burning waste coal, so I would like to briefly share some data on the scope of the problem

and the work being done in Pennsylvania. An inventory of waste coal sites maintained by DEP's Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation lists approximately 820 waste coal bank sites covering 9,500 acres. Fifty of these coal waste banks are burning; posing an additional hazard. The estimated volume of waste coal in these coal waste banks is over 224,000,000 cubic yards. Reclamation at these sites is prioritized based on the environmental and safety impacts they represent. Refuse piles are subject to sliding and collapse, and erosion that clogs and pollutes stream channels. There is considerable reclamation work to be done at these sites; including regrading, revegetation, and water treatment. This work is expensive. Fortunately, due to advances in technology, waste coal that meets certain specifications can now be used as a fuel source at Fluidized-Bed Combustion plants. This provides an economic incentive for private companies to "remine" these coal refuse sites. This type of re-mining provides considerable reclamation at many coal waste sites across the Commonwealth. An added benefit is that the alkaline coal ash produced by Fluidized-Bed Combustion plants is suitable for beneficial use at mine sites. As a result, reliable quantities of ash are available to complete large reclamation projects, often in proximity to the waste coal banks consumed by the plant, where no other suitable fill would be available. Many of these large abandoned pits eventually filled with coal ash would not likely have otherwise been reclaimed. Over 5,000 acres of mine-scarred lands were reclaimed

in the Commonwealth by re-mining of waste coal and the beneficial use of coal ash. Hundreds of miles of formerly dead streams that drained these abandoned mine lands were revived. Most importantly, this reclamation work is done by private mine operators at no cost to the Commonwealth.

Re-mining of coal waste sites has considerable positive environmental and economic impacts. Re-mining projects create high paying jobs. Land, which was previously burdened by waste coal piles, is now contoured and replanted. The site ceases to be a source of acidic mine drainage. Local streams can recover, property values increase, and the land is available for higher uses.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to address any questions.