

MS. WEIDNER: My name is Sharon Weidner. And I've been a nurse for 35 years. And I have great concerns about the health of our people and our lands. Thank you. Coal is the least efficient of fossil fuels in terms of the amount of energy gained versus the CO2 released. Burning coal releases numerous toxic chemicals and particulates, which can have hidden costs to a country's population in terms of life expectancy and increased health cost. While pollutants, such as acid gases, stay in a local area, metals, such as lead and arsenic, travel beyond the State line. And fine particulate matter has a global impact. Physicians for Social Responsibility released a report in 2009 called Coal's Assault of Human Health. Some of what they're saying is that coal combustion releases mercury particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, sulfur oxide, dioxide, and dozens of other hazardous substances. Air pollutants produced by coal combustion act on our respiratory system, causing asthma, lung disease, lung cancer. Pollutants from coal combustion have cardiovascular effects as arterial blockage causing heart attacks, tissue death due to oxygen deprivation, leading to permanent heart damage, as well as cardiac arrhythmia, and congestive heart failure. Coal pollutants, mainly mercury, act on the nervous system to cause decreased influxual [phonetic] capacity. It's estimated that between 300 and 600,000 children born each year with blood mercury levels high enough to decrease the IQ scores and cause lifelong loss of intelligence. Researchers from Harvard University School of Public Health found that pregnant women exposed to high levels of mercury were twice as likely to have an autistic child than their peers in low-pollution areas. Even people who do not develop illness from coal pollutants will find their health and wellbeing impacted due to coal's contribution to climate change. We're seeing increased and stronger storm systems causing flooding. Increased temperatures causing fires, heat stroke, malaria. Declining food production, scarce water supplies, social conflict, and starvation. There are negative impacts in each step of the coal life cycle. Coal mining leads U.S. industries in fatal injuries and is associated with chronic health problems among miners. The communities near the mines may be as [indiscernible] affected by blasting, washing, leakage from [indiscernible] ponds, damage to streams and waterways. And I'd just like to say that the cost of coal, it has to include our health and our planet's health.