

# **Durbin, Duckworth, Budzinski Urge ATSDR To Conduct Public Health Assessment On Impact Of Decades Of Flooding In Cahokia Heights**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), co-founder of the Senate Environmental Justice Caucus, and U.S. Representative Nikki Budzinski (D-IL-13) today sent a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

(ATSDR) urging the agency to conduct a public health assessment on the impact of decades of flooding in Cahokia Heights, Illinois.

“We write to request that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) conduct a public health assessment on the impact of decades of flooding in Cahokia Heights, Illinois,” the lawmakers began their letter. “For years, residents in Cahokia Heights have struggled with flash flooding, raw sewage in yards and homes, and potentially dangerous drinking water—the result of large-scale infrastructure problems that have failed to protect residents’ homes. As you are aware, prolonged exposure to floodwater and sewage can pose a significant public health threat from exposure to mold and other bacteria linked to infections and cancers.”

The letter cited a recent report that raised questions about how the flooding may be impacting residents’ health.

“Preliminary findings from a study conducted by Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Colorado reportedly found that more than 40 percent of adults in Cahokia Heights who were tested last year were infected with *Helicobacter pylori*, which can cause ulcers or increase the risk of gastric cancer. Additionally, residents of Cahokia Heights have reported respiratory and cardiovascular problems that could be connected to floodwater and sewage,” the letter continued.

The lawmakers concluded the letter by urging ATSDR to bring federal resources to bear in order to conduct a public health assessment, including convening a community forum, to examine how the years of flooding may have impacted the health of nearby residents.

“Therefore, we are requesting ATSDR provide vital federal assistance to Cahokia Heights by conducting a comprehensive public health assessment and more fully informing residents about any possible risks to their health. Further, we urge ATSDR to consider holding a community forum to discuss the flooding in Cahokia Heights and its public health impacts to help ensure a transparent and robust study,” the lawmakers wrote.

The letter concluded, “With ATSDR's leadership, and in partnership with state and local public health officials, we can reassure families in Cahokia Heights that their government always will prioritize public health.”

In [August 2022](#), Durbin met with Cahokia Heights residents and visited flood sites in East St. Louis. To date, Durbin has helped secure more than \$30 million in federal funding to help Cahokia Heights finally address their historic and ongoing flooding and water infrastructure issues.

Durbin also secured a commitment from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to take on an expanded role in the Metro East area to address flooding and water infrastructure issues and increased the Corps' authorized funding limit for Metro East in the *Water Resources Development Act of 2022*, passed in December 2022, which will allow additional federal funding to be earmarked in the coming years to address these issues in Cahokia Heights, East St. Louis, and the surrounding area.

Full text of today's letter is available [here](#).