

Budzinski, Durbin, Duckworth Request Public Health Assessment on Impact of Cahokia Heights Flooding

by Philip Shelly

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, Congresswoman Nikki Budzinski (IL-13) joined Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth in sending a letter urging the Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) 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,” wrote the lawmakers. “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 lawmakers 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.

Since taking office, Congresswoman Budzinski has been dedicated to solving long-standing health and safety challenges in the Metro East region. In August, Budzinski hosted EPA officials in East St. Louis and Cahokia Heights to hear directly from residents about their health concerns related to air pollution and contaminated water.

[Budzinski recently secured the appointment of a federal coordinator](#) from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to support progress on the flooding, sewage and drinking water crisis in Cahokia Heights.

[**Full text of today’s letter is available here and below:**](#)

December 11, 2023

Dear Director Bernstein:

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.

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 Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) has been engaged and monitoring certain data sources to examine this issue. However, we believe the public health threat posed by flooding in Cahokia Heights requires a whole-of-government approach that can complement IDPH’s efforts to address this unique challenge.

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.

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.

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. Thank you for your time and attention to this request.

Sincerely,