ACAA
AMERICAN COAL ASH ASSOCIATION

ACAA CHAMPION AWARD HONOREES

The ACAA Champion Award

ACAA established The Champion Award in 2012 to recognize those who have made extraordinary contributions to the beneficial use of coal combustion products. These contributions are found in many forms, including research, discovering and advancing applications, marketing, education and training, regulatory and government affairs, and industry organization and leadership. Recipients may be individuals, private or public institutions, or members or non-members of the ACAA, living or deceased. The recipient is selected exclusively by the Chair of the ACAA Board of Directors and is known only to the Chair until the moment the presentation is made.

Following are the past awardees and their specific areas of contribution. While this is by no means a comprehensive record of all persons and organizations who have made important contributions in pursuit of the ACAA mission, the list identifies some of the industry's dedicated leaders and their areas of focus that have helped to maintain, modify, and grow the markets we serve today.

Past Awardees

2025 – Thomas C. Hendrix, The SEFA Group

Thomas C. Hendrix, founder of The SEFA Group (now part of Heidelberg Materials), was honored for his lifetime dedication to coal combustion product beneficial use, support of the industry, and development of technologies to improve the processing of byproducts, with an emphasis on harvesting resources from coal ash landfills. The SEFA Group was one of many small businesses that started up during the 1970s to address CCP materials that were being generated and sent to disposal units. Over the years, the company expanded operations to support sales along the eastern seaboard and, at the same time, developed a process to beneficiate ash to meet market needs. This technology, known as STAR, has proven to be particularly effective in ash landfill harvesting applications and is recognized as the first technology to be used on ponded ash on a commercial scale.

2022 – Lawrence L. Sutter, Michigan Technological University

Lawrence L. Sutter is Professor Emeritus at Michigan Technological University. Prior to retiring to Emeritus status, Professor Sutter taught Materials Science and Engineering and served as Associate Dean of Research and External Relations, as well as Director of the Applied Chemical and Morphological Analysis Laboratory. For over 40 years, Professor Sutter has been engaged in materials characterization, concrete materials research, and concrete durability issues. Much of that work has focused on secondary and recycled materials such as fly ash and blast furnace slag. He has also closely studied the effects of deicing chemicals on concrete pavements. Professor Sutter is actively engaged in numerous committees and subcommittees of ASTM International and the American Concrete Institute. He is a fellow of both organizations and has received many awards from ASTM and ACI for his contributions. In recent years, he has worked to continually revise and improve numerous guides, specifications, and standards, most notably ASTM C618, Standard Specification for Coal Fly Ash and Raw or Calcined Natural Pozzolan for Use in Concrete—the cornerstone specification for the use of fly ash in concrete in the U.S.

2020 – Charles E. Price, Charah Solutions

Charles E. Price is the retired founder of Charah Solutions and former chairman of the American Coal Ash Association. Price founded Charah in his Louisville, Kentucky, home with his wife Janet in 1987. The company started out completing publicly bid general contracting work and then expanded into civil construction jobs for local surface coal mines. In 1992, Charah performed its first coal ash project, completing a pond excavation project for Big Rivers Electric Cooperative in western Kentucky. Charah primarily focused on coal ash pond and landfill projects throughout the 1990s, expanding outside of Kentucky with projects in the Carolinas, Pennsylvania, and Florida. The company moved into fly ash and bottom ash marketing in the early 2000s. Price was always focused on new and inventive ideas for performing work, which resulted in his receipt of three patents related to processing coal ash for beneficial use. In 2012, he directly oversaw research and development of the first synthetic gypsum pelletizing plant in the United States to allow for easier and more efficient use of synthetic gypsum in agricultural applications. At the time of his retirement in 2019, Price had overseen the growth of Charah from a ground-zero startup to a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange employing over 1,000 people.

2018 – Bruce W. Ramme, WEC Energies Group

Dr. Bruce W. Ramme, retired Vice President of Environmental for WEC Energy Group, joined WEC Energies in 1980 as a civil engineer in the transmission engineering division. Subsequent assignments found him involved in civil engineering design and project management, power plant leadership roles, and environmental responsibilities that included coal combustion product management. He was named an ACI Fellow in 2005 and has received many other honors, including several engineer-of-the-year awards. Dr. Ramme is the author of numerous papers on concrete and fly ash, as well as a comprehensive handbook on coal combustion product utilization. He holds more than a dozen patents on CCP management and use. A professor at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee College of Engineering and Applied Science, he serves as Associate Director of the university's Center for By-Products Utilization.

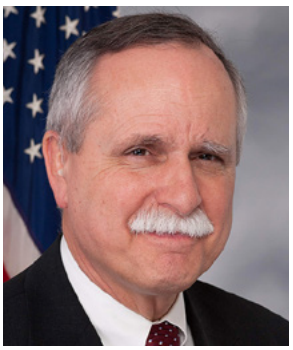
2017 – University of Kentucky Center for Applied Energy Research

The Center for Applied Energy Research (CAER) at the University of Kentucky received the ACAA Champion Award in recognition of its decades of research, education, and training on coal ash beneficial use. ACAA and CAER are especially close partners—since 2005 cosponsoring the World of Coal Ash, which has grown to become the flagship event for the international coal combustion product industry. Additionally, CAER's Materials Technologies Group specializes in developing construction materials from a wide variety of CCPs. Founded in 1972 with a grant of $400,000 from the Kentucky General Assembly to advance coal use, CAER's multidisciplinary research work extends far beyond the coal ash world as it investigates energy technologies to improve the environment; contributes to technically sound policies related to coal, energy, and the environment; adds to the teaching and instruction aim of UK by educating students from pre-college to postgraduate levels and being involved in labor force development for Kentucky; promotes UK's objective of developing and benefiting from its intellectual property with a balance between the publication of scientific results and patenting; and provides public service through scientific education and its energy-related competencies.

2015 – USDA Agricultural Research Service

USDA's Agricultural Research Service was selected as the recipient of the fourth ACAA Champion Award in recognition of its multi-year efforts to qualify flue gas desulfurization (FGD) gypsum as a useful and desirable soil amendment. Because FGD gypsum is comparable to mined gypsum and more readily available in many parts of the country, there is significant potential to increase its use in agricultural settings. However, available research documenting the effects of FGD gypsum on plants, soils, and the environment was limited prior to ARS's activities. Beginning in 2007, a number of projects were undertaken by scientists from USDA Agricultural Research Service locations in Auburn, Ala.; Beltsville, Md.; Oxford, Miss.; and Watkinsville, Ga., to study the agricultural effectiveness of FGD gypsum as a soil amendment and determine safe levels for FGD gypsum application. Of particular interest to this group was reducing the transport of soluble P contamination from areas receiving applications of poultry litter and evaluating the potential for loss of contaminants into the environment. Experiments demonstrated that water quality could be greatly improved with the use of gypsum to decrease both P and microorganisms in runoff from poultry litter applications. FGD gypsum also improved soil quality, increasing the amount of rainwater infiltrating into the soil. In addition, trace elements in runoff were shown to be below EPA water quality standards.

2014 – U.S. Representative David B. McKinley



Former Congressman David B. McKinley of West Virginia, a registered professional engineer with a deep knowledge of beneficial use of CCP, became the elected voice for beneficial use in the U.S. Congress in his very first month following his election in 2010. Within 30 days of being sworn into office, McKinley authored a bill preventing the EPA from creating hazardous waste regulations for the management of CCP. That one-paragraph bill was the first in a series of bills passed by the House of Representatives with bipartisan support. During the process of getting his bill through the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Congressman McKinley worked hard to convince his colleagues to focus attention on the issue, even confronting former Speaker of the House John Boehner in a heated discussion. In the dark days of 2010, the ACAA needed a strong, passionate champion in Washington, D.C., and David McKinley was the right man at the right time.

2013 – David C. Goss, Former ACAA Executive Director

ACAA bestowed the second-ever Champion Award on former ACAA Executive Director David C. Goss. During his tenure as Executive Director of the association, Goss helped ACAA stabilize its fragile financial condition, grew the services provided, increased membership, and improved the association's reputation to outside organizations. He also brought the ACAA together with the Center for Applied Energy Research at the University of Kentucky to create the highly successful World of Coal Ash. Goss retired in December 2008, just as the coal ash spill at the Kingston generating station in Tennessee changed the coal ash landscape dramatically. To assist ACAA in facing the challenge, he stayed on as a volunteer and consultant assisting the organization on several fronts.

2012 – John N. Ward, ACAA Government Relations Committee Chairman

ACAA presented its first Champion Award to John N. Ward for his exceptional work in providing leadership in meeting challenges from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and ENGOs following the Kingston, Tenn., ash spill in December 2008. Ward entered the coal ash marketing business in 1998 as Vice President, Marketing and Government Affairs, for ISG Resources (later Headwaters). He has since served as president of John Ward Inc., a public affairs consultancy to the coal ash and energy industries. Ward is the longstanding chairman of ACAA's Government Relations Committee and the author of ACAA's weekly *Phoenix* newsletter. With his deep experience behind the scenes in Washington, D.C., he has consistently provided valuable advice and strategic guidance to the association.