



Ohio Student Environmental Coalition

Special Edition: TVA Coal Ash Disaster

One of the largest environmental atrocities in the history of this nation occurred 3 days before Christmas in a small town in Eastern Tennessee. At the foot of a coal-fired power plant stood an enormous coal ash holding pond, a toxic coal byproduct. More than a *billion* gallons of this sludge were released when the dam broke two weeks ago, destroying homes and lives. This is epic stuff. Please give attention to the 'Take Action' section at the bottom.

-- INITIAL COVERAGE --

Breaking: TVA ash storage pond breach covers 400 acres in Roane County

Knoxville News Sentinel, December 22, 2008

HARRIMAN — A retention pond wall collapsed early this morning at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston steam plant, releasing a mixture of water and fly ash that flooded nearly a dozen homes and caused a train wreck.

No injuries have been reported, but one house was swept into the middle of Swan Pond Circle Road and huge piles of wet fly ash cover the roadway. Officials say 4 to 6 feet of material washed out of the pond and now covers up to 400 acres of land adjacent to the plant.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2008/dec/22/officials-dike-burst-floods-homes-near-tva-plant/>

Coal Ash Spill Revives Issue of Its Hazards



15 homes like this one in Harriman, TN were flooded with fly ash sludge on Monday after a storage pond wall broke

New York Times, December 24, 2008 -- KINGSTON, Tenn. — What may be the nation's largest spill of coal ash lay thick and largely untouched over hundreds of acres of land and waterways Wednesday after a dam broke this week, as officials and environmentalists argued over its potential toxicity.

Federal studies have long shown coal ash to contain significant quantities of heavy metals like arsenic, lead and selenium, which can cause cancer and neurological problems. But with no official word on the dangers of the sludge in Tennessee, displaced residents spent Christmas Eve worried about their health and their property, and wondering what to do.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/25/us/25sludge.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3&hp

Tenn. sludge gives coal a 'black eye'

The NBC Nighly News blasts "clean coal" propaganda:



Tennessee Ash Flood Larger Than Initial Estimate

New York Times, December 26, 2008 -- A coal ash spill in eastern Tennessee that experts were already calling the largest environmental disaster of its kind in the United States is more than three times as large as initially estimated, according to an updated survey by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Officials at the authority initially said that about 1.7 million cubic yards of wet coal ash had spilled when the earthen retaining wall of an ash pond at the Kingston Fossil Plant, about 40 miles west of Knoxville, gave way on Monday. But on Thursday they released the results of an aerial survey that showed the actual amount was 5.4 million cubic yards, or enough to flood more than 3,000 acres one foot deep.

The amount now said to have been spilled is larger than the amount the authority initially said was in the pond, 2.6 million cubic yards.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/27/us/27sludge.html?_r=2&hp

-- ON THE GROUND --

A Grassroots Political Appeal

Here is a video of Rick Kantrel, a resident of the disaster area in Kingston, TN, inviting local, state, and federal Government officials to a personal tour of one of the most damaged area of the spill site, his backyard and neighborhood. Please circulate far and wide.



Another video from local impacted citizen

This is incredible. The community around the fly ash spill (I prefer to call it a dump) is organizing like you wouldn't believe! [United Mountain Defense](#) organized a community meeting and set up a list serve for the community and they are just running with it. The list was started on the night of Jan. 4th and there have already been nearly 100 posts to it.

Check out this amazing video created by a community member:



Aerial coverage

Knoxville News Sentinel, 12/22/08 - The primary aerial video of the disaster, with over 125,000 views to date.



- - FOLLOW UP COVERAGE - -

Hundreds of Coal Ash Dumps Lack Regulation



Three hundred acres were covered with toxic sludge in late December when a wall of a coal ash holding pond near Kingston in East Tennessee gave way.

New York Times, January 6, 2009 -- The coal ash pond that ruptured and sent a billion gallons of toxic sludge across 300 acres of East Tennessee last month was only one of more than 1,300 similar dumps across the United States — most of them unregulated and unmonitored — that contain billions more gallons of fly ash and other byproducts of burning coal.

Like the one in Tennessee, most of these dumps, which reach up to 1,500 acres, contain heavy metals like arsenic, lead, mercury and selenium, which are considered by the EPA to be a threat to water supplies and human health. Yet they are not subject to any federal regulation, which experts say could have prevented the spill, and there is little monitoring of their effects on the surrounding environment.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/us/07sludge.html>

Few regulations restrain tons of toxic coal sludge **Coal-ash ponds**

Some fear holding-pond disaster could happen here, too

The Columbus Dispatch, 1/8/09 -- Ohio power plants store billions of gallons of toxic coal waste in ponds that environmental advocates say are mostly unregulated by state and federal officials. Nine of the 13 plants rely on dams to hold back these ponds, the largest of which can hold as much as 9.1 billion gallons of water and coal ash.

A dam at a pond operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority burst Dec. 22, releasing more than 1 billion gallons of coal ash and water that covered 300 acres in a gray toxic sludge. Ohio government and utility officials say they believe the dams at 20 ponds are sound. But according to state records, many of the dams at smaller ponds haven't been inspected in more than a decade.

Nine coal-fired power plants in Ohio use dams to hold liquified coal ash in 20 ponds. The power plant operators, the size of the ponds and the date they were last inspected by state dam-safety officials:



http://www.dispatchpolitics.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2009/01/08/copy/Coalash.ART_ART_01-08-09_A1_POCF50K.html?adsec=politics&sid=101

Coal-Ash Spill May Cost Utilities Billions in Rules

Dec. 31 (Bloomberg) -- U.S. power companies may face billions of dollars a year in new costs after last week's coal-sludge spill in east Tennessee if the accident results in regulating their wastes as toxic.

The accident that unleashed a billion-gallon outpouring from a Tennessee Valley Authority power plant on Dec. 22 may revive efforts in Washington to tighten rules on so-called fly ash that's laden with heavy metals, and other waste from coal-fired generators. The proposals stalled during the eight years of President George W. Bush's administration.

Increased regulation would bring costs to upgrade or close more than 600 landfills and waste ponds at 440 plants nationwide. While the Environmental Protection Agency put the price tag at \$1 billion a year in 2000, power generators predict the cost would be as high as \$5 billion, said Jim Roewer, executive director of the industry-funded Utility Solid Waste Activities Group, in a telephone interview. Power generators and ash recyclers predicted a push in Washington for more rules.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aJvY7sO2X0oo&refer=home>

- - RESOURCES - -

Factsheet - Coal Ash: A National Problem

http://www.earthjustice.org/library/policy_factsheets/coal-ash-a-national-problem.pdf

Great websites with current information and action opportunities:

<http://www.ilovemountains.org/tva-spill/>

<http://www.unitedmountaindefense.org/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennessee_coal_sludge_spill

Background on TVA, Tennessee and coal, and Tom Kilgore:

http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Tennessee_Valley_Authority

http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Tennessee_and_coal http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Tom_D._Kilgore

- - TAKE ACTION - -

Please forward along to your lists, action alerts. Right now the Senate is conducting a hearing on this man-made disaster -- lets make sure the Governor of TN knows we're watching him!

We need your help, now!

People are sick and someone has to help. On Monday, December 22 around 1:00 a.m. over a billion gallons of ice cold toxic waste burst out of a coal ash waste dam near the TVA Kingston coal-fired power plant in Eastern Tennessee. It covered 400 acres of land up to 6 feet and flooded into tributaries of the Tennessee River - the water supply for millions of people living downstream in Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Take Action Today! Here's two quick things you can do to help.

1. Give Resources to impacted citizens for desperately needed health tests

There is a brief window for citizens to get tested to see if they've been exposed to arsenic -- but these tests cost \$500. The initial information sent to citizens told them if they boiled their water it would be safe -- but boiling water doesn't remove dangerous and deadly heavy metals. [Independent tests](#) have found levels up to 300 times the EPA standard. Money is needed for health tests, volunteer expenses and more. Please help by visiting www.unitedmountaindefense.org to send checks for copies, paper, gas and general support funds to [United Mountain Defense](#) P.O. Box 20363 Knoxville, TN 37920 Please mark check: "For TVA Spill" [or visit their PayPal](#)

2. Tell the TN Governor to make sure it doesn't happen again

Whether you live in Tennessee or not -- Governor Phil Bredesen needs to take action to protect the citizens of Tennessee--Please call the Governor of Tennessee at 615.741.2001 and tell him to:

- **Call for Federal assistance and take immediate action to protect the local citizens.** Arsenic and heavy metals have been ingested by people living around the massive spill. They need to be tested and, if positive, treated quickly. Residents should not be forced to fundraise for medical exams following TVA's terrible mistakes.
- **Enact and enforce Coal Ash and Coal Combustion Waste regulations.** The EPA has repeatedly avoided regulating TVA and Coal Combustion Waste -- despite knowing about coal ash dangers for over 28 years. EPA data shows there are hundreds more coal ash waste dumps across the US -- whose community will be next?
- **Hold TVA accountable for their actions.** TVA is trying to blame this disaster on the rain -- but they should have built the toxic waste holding dam with rainfall in mind. TVA and the State of Tennessee should hold public hearings and investigate the bursting of the coal ash dam and the potential future danger to the local citizens and environment. TVA must upgrade all coal ash ponds to include safety liners and provide education for all residents likely to be impacted by any problems with other TVA ash dumps. TVA must completely clean up and restore the affected properties and water ways and pay restitution for human suffering involved in the ash pond failure. And the Governor must make sure that TVA does these things.

Please Call the Governor (whether you live in TN or not) and tell him that he should protect the citizens of TN, not the government owned coal interests. He must call on the Federal government to provide clean water now, medical testing as a first step toward taking responsibility. You can also email him -- just cut and paste the bullet points above in an email (though calls are better).

Governor Phil Bredesen
615.741.2001 / phil.bredesen@state.tn.us