

EPA relents, discloses list of high-risk coal ash sites

June 30 2009, By Renee Schoof, McClatchy Newspapers

The Environmental Protection Agency on Monday released a list of 44 coal-fired power plant waste sites in 10 states with a high hazard potential, including 12 sites in North Carolina, seven in Kentucky and a large storage pond in Pennsylvania.

The list is the result of an investigation that the EPA ordered after the failure of a Tennessee Valley Authority coal ash pond in Kingston, Tenn., flooded more than 300 acres of land in December. After the spill, the EPA required electric utilities that store coal ash in surface impoundments to respond to mandatory questionnaires about their sites.

The EPA initially refused to disclose the location of the high-hazard sites to the public, saying it would share the information only with members of Congress and their staffs. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, pressed the agency to release the list, saying the public had a right to know.

Coal combustion waste stored for many years in impoundment sites at power plants contains toxins such as arsenic, selenium, cadmium and chromium. Even so, national regulations for coal ash are less strict than those for household trash. The EPA is working on new regulations for coal ash waste that are expected by the end of the year.

The next step is for the EPA to review the information it has gathered about the coal-ash sites and call for cleanup and repairs as needed, the

agency said in a news release.

The EPA said the high-hazard rating at the 44 sites didn't mean that they were structurally weak, but rather that a failure would probably kill people nearby.

"The presence of liquid coal ash impoundments near our homes, schools and business could pose a serious risk to life and property in the event of an impoundment rupture," said EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson in a statement. "By compiling a list of these facilities, EPA will be better able to identify and reduce potential risks by working with states and local emergency responders."

The 44 include 10 Duke Energy ponds at plants in Spencer, Eden, Terrell, Belmont, Walnut Cove and Mount Holly, N.C., and two Progress Energy Carolinas ponds in Arden, N.C.; two Kentucky Utilities ponds near Harrodsburg, Ky., and three in Ghent, Ky.; a Louisville Gas & Electric pond in Louisville, Ky.; and a Georgia Power facility in Milledgeville, Ga.

Also on the list was the large Little Blue Run Dam pond that holds waste from the First Energy Generation plant at Shippingport, Pa.

The list also include impoundments in Arizona, Indiana, Illinois, West Virginia, Ohio and Montana.

Boxer said that she was glad to see the EPA release the list of the sites.

"I called on the administration to release the list of these high hazard sites so that people have the information they need to quickly press for action to make these sites safer. One of the lessons we all learned from the TVA coal ash spill is that a close look at these waste sites is extremely important," she said in a statement.

The December spill in Kingston flooded 300 acres and released [coal ash](#) into the Emory and Clinch rivers in Tennessee. No one was killed, but homes and other property were damaged. The TVA estimated cleanup costs at up to \$825 million.

ON THE WEB

The EPA site list:

www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/in...il/ccrs-fs/index.htm

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