



Environmentalist says no good coal ash solution

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(AP) — CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. - An Environmental Protection Agency official says storing coal ash without a liner at the site of a toxic spill west of Knoxville will not make any groundwater in the area undrinkable.

That prediction provides little assurance for some residents near the Tennessee Valley Authority's disastrous December 2008 spill or for environmental activists who want to see coal ash regulated more strictly.

EPA's project manager at the cleanup, Craig Zeller, told The Associated Press that any test well readings near the TVA's spill that exceed maximum contaminant levels for drinking water would "trigger" corrective action.

Zeller said there is no current sign of groundwater contamination where TVA stored the coal ash for more than 50 years before the breach in an earthen dam sent 5.4 million cubic yards of toxic muck into the Emory River and surrounding landscape.

He said existing test wells in the spill area are "compliant with drinking water standards" and predicts that will not change with the plan to store more than 2 million cubic yards of ash at the Kingston Plant site.

"If it becomes obvious in the future that there is a groundwater plume that needs to be addressed, we will address it," he said.

TVA's change to onsite storage follows a year of sending dredged ash to an Alabama landfill.

With EPA slowly deciding how to regulate coal plant ash that contains arsenic, selenium, mercury and other substances that are defined as hazardous, Environmental Integrity Project director Eric Schaeffer said EPA and TVA should describe the planned pollutant monitoring.

Schaeffer said there should also be stated "triggers" for fixing any problems.

"There ought to be a kind of very simple fact sheet to show when this stuff moves off site and what the response will be," he said.

With EPA approval, TVA announced plans Tuesday to keep cleaned up ash at the spill site in Roane County, a decision that worries the Roane County Community Advisory Group. Brenda Timm, the Roane County group's chairwoman, said EPA has never otherwise allowed such storage "like TVA plans to do out there now."

Zeller said there are a numerous ways to deal with any pollution that were to occur from the ash, such as a pump and treatment system, special drainage, an "injection of chemical agents of some kind," or changes in the containment facility.

"We put in groundwater remediation systems in far more difficult situations than this," Zeller said.

TVA picked the onsite storage option for a 4-year, phase 2 of the cleanup after a phase 1 that has shipped dredged ash to the Arrowhead Landfill in Perry County, Ala. With TVA rate payers facing overall cleanup

costs that projections show could total \$1.2 billion, the onsite option is cheaper than continuing rail or truck shipments elsewhere.

"The problem is there is no good solution," Schaeffer said. "You are just left with a lot of bad choices."

Tallahassee, Fla.-based environmental attorney David Ludder has filed court actions challenging the landfill's handling of the coal ash shipments and said his clients in Alabama "will be thrilled" by TVA's decision to stop using it.

The landfill amid unusually heavy rain has at times had problems with too much drained wastewater.

Retiree James Gibbs, 53, of Uniontown, Ala., lives near the landfill and said he is thankful that an end to rail cars hauling the coal ash shipments is in sight. Gibbs said he still worries about pollution in the ground where he has planted a garden with tomatoes, collards, okra and cabbage.

"I guess if you couldn't eat it, I guess somebody will come out and tell you," he said.

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