

U.S. Rep. Artur Davis wants feds to clearly determine risks to Alabamians posed by coal ash

By Tom Gordon -- The Birmingham News

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U.S. Rep. Artur Davis of Birmingham has re-issued his call for the federal government to establish consistent standards to determine the "health and environmental risks" posed by coal ash, which is being **shipped daily to a sprawling landfill in the Alabama Black Belt county of Perry.**

"I believe that residents and elected officials in Perry County deserve a clearer answer than they have received about the health and environmental risks posed by coal ash," the Birmingham Democrat says in a statement submitted to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment.

Davis' statement echoes what he said in an October letter to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson.

The Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee will hold a hearing Wednesday on the one-year anniversary of a massive spill of coal ash following the collapse of an earthen dam at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Fuel Plant in Roane County, Tenn.

Since July, TVA has been shipping thousands of tons of the coal ash virtually every day in rail cars to the Arrowhead Landfill, near Uniontown in southern Perry County. The goal is to deliver about 3 million of the 5.4 million tons spilled at Kingston, and to do it in the next 12 to 18 months. Coal ash is a byproduct of coal-fired power plants.

The Perry County Commission receives \$1.05 for each ton of waste that comes into the landfill and officials say the shipments will generate millions of dollars for the impoverished county. The landfill has 88 workers, 57 of them Perry County residents. In remarks prepared for today's hearing, county commissioner Albert Turner Jr. said the contract between TVA and Arrowhead "has provided the county with an economic windfall unseen since the state of Texas struck oil."

In his statement, Davis, who is seeking the 2010 Democratic gubernatorial nomination, says he understood how the landfill had generated jobs and tax revenues and that the storage of coal ash there "violates no current state or federal law, and that a reclassification of coal ash as hazardous could pose significant burdens on coal reliant-industries.

"However, it is increasingly apparent that the federal government has to date not conclusively analyzed or addressed the potential hazards of large scale coal ash storage," Davis says. "The time has come for the Environmental Protection Agency ... to establish consistent standards at the federal level that would fully address these legitimate concerns about the content of coal ash waste. If coal ash poses an unacceptable level of risk, inconsistent state standards should be immediately replaced with national guidelines that would put the safety of the people in one community on the same level as families living in another."



Congressman Artur Davis is asking federal environmental officials to act more swiftly to assure the safety of coal ash being shipped into west Alabama for disposal in Perry County. (Jeff Roberts/Birmingham News file photo)

An environmental attorney, **David Ludder**, says the landfill does not have the necessary state permit to discharge pollutants contained in material generated at the site through the wastewater plant in the Perry County seat of Marion.

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