

Coal Ash: Let Your Voice Be Heard

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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is giving voice to those affected by the largest coal ash spill in U.S. history. The EPA is holding a [public hearing](#) on Wednesday, October 27th in Knoxville Tennessee regarding the agency's proposal to regulate the disposal and management of coal ash from power plants. The catastrophic Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) coal ash pond collapse in December 2008 spilled over one billion gallons of hazardous material into rivers and communities around Kingston Tennessee. The hearing will allow citizens directly affected by the environmental devastation to present their case for the effective control of hazardous coal combustion residues in order to protect both people and the planet.

What is coal ash and why should we be concerned?

According to Amy Galland of [As You Sow](#), a San Francisco based nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing corporate environmental and social responsibility, "Coal ash is the byproduct of burning coal, and it contains potentially high concentrations of arsenic, mercury, lead, selenium, cadmium, and other heavy metals that threaten our health." She explains. "It's the contaminants that pollution control equipment prevent smokestacks from emitting into the air end up in the ash."

Here's some food for environmental thought: Coal-burning power plants produce over 130 million tons of coal ash each year, much of which is stored in huge landfills and sludge ponds across the country.

Any potential for problems in this scenario? With the results of the TVA calamity, if you took a canoe trip along the Emory River in Tennessee, it would be like oaring through a vat of thick, toxic chocolate milk.

The TVA disaster sparked investor involvement in the EPA's proposed regulatory overhaul of Coal-burning power plants. "It's important to know that coal ash ponds and landfills are currently less consistently regulated than landfills accepting household trash," Galland explains. "The EPA has been 'reviewing' coal ash for decades, but only after the TVA spill did the agency propose two possible regulatory options." Under the proposed *Subtitle C*, Galland states, "Necessary changes occur, such as creating federally-enforceable uniform standards for coal ash disposal, closing down and dewatering the ash sludge ponds, and requiring that companies prove they are financially capable of properly disposing of coal ash."

[As You Sow](#) along with [Green Century Capital Management](#) (an environmentally responsible investment firm) have teamed up to organize a group of investors representing over \$240 billion of assets to back the EPA in support of Subtitle C.

So why do investors care about coal ash? Aren't they just supposed to be about making money? Emily Stone of Green Century weighs in: "The investment community is increasingly recognizing that environmental irresponsibility can have direct consequences on company bottom-lines and shareholder value -- just look at BP!"

People can submit comments, to the EPA to help regulate coal ash under Subtitle C at: www.epacoal.org. You have until November 19th to lend a hand on the safe regulation of coal ash.