Alabama and Coal Ash Disposal in Ponds and Landfills

Summary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Operator</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry Power Station</td>
<td>Alabama Power Co</td>
<td>1 pond</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colbert Power Station</td>
<td>Tennessee Valley Authority</td>
<td>3 ponds</td>
<td>Colbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadsden Power Station</td>
<td>Alabama Power Co</td>
<td>1 pond</td>
<td>Etowah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorgas Power Station</td>
<td>Alabama Power Co</td>
<td>2 ponds</td>
<td>Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene County Power Station</td>
<td>Alabama Power Co</td>
<td>1 pond</td>
<td>Greene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E C Gaston (ALAP)</td>
<td>Alabama Power Co</td>
<td>1 pond</td>
<td>Shelby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles R. Lowman Power Station</td>
<td>Power South Energy Cooperative</td>
<td>3 ponds/landfill*</td>
<td>Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James H. Miller Jr. Power Station</td>
<td>Alabama Power Co</td>
<td>1 pond</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows Creek Power Station</td>
<td>Tennessee Valley Authority</td>
<td>2 ponds</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates one or more coal ash landfills.

Amount of coal ash generated per year: 3.2 million tons. AL ranks 14th in the country for coal ash generation.

The U.S. EPA has not yet gathered information on coal ash disposal in landfills, so a detailed breakdown is not yet available.

Information on Alabama Coal Ash Ponds

Number of Coal Ash Ponds: 15 ponds at nine plants.

Pond Ratings: Two rated “high hazard.” Three were rated “significant hazard.”

Age of Ponds: 15 ponds are over 20 years old, and seven of those are over 30 years old. The age of these ponds makes it unlikely that they have safeguards like liners and leachate collection systems. According to a 2007 EPA risk assessment, five ash ponds are only clay lined. Ash ponds at the Barry Power Station in Mobile County and the Widows Creek Power Station in Jackson County are unlined. At least seven ash ponds do not have leachate groundwater collection systems.

Capacity and releases: The EPA surface impoundment database indicates that that the total storage capacity data for ponds in AL is 87,856 acres feet. The total surface area for these ponds is nearly 3000 acres. The average height of AL coal ash impoundments is over 6.5 stories (66.1

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5 Id.
6 Id.
8 Id.
9 Id.; see also id. at 3-9 to 3-10.
According to the U.S. EPA damage case assessment, potential damage cases in Alabama include:

- Tennessee Valley Authority – Widows Creek Fossil Fuel Plant. An on-site well has shown levels of lead exceeding EPA’s MCL, as well as elevated levels of cadmium and chromium.  
- Tennessee Valley Authority – Colbert Fossil Fuel Plant. Commenters report that the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) “believes ground water contamination has resulted from the disposal of coal combustion wastes at this facility. An ADEM geologist also reported to the commenters that the disposal area has been subject to collapse into a karst sinkhole.”

**Disposal of Coal Ash at Perry County Landfill, Uniontown, Alabama:** Over 5 million tons of ash from the Kingston TVA coal ash spill was shipped to the poorest county in the Black Belt of Alabama for disposal, despite the lack of state regulations controlling such disposal in Alabama. Citizens in Uniontown claim that the landfill, which towers above their homes, has sickened their community and polluted their air, water and soil. Residents have filed a complaint against the landfill owners for violations of federal pollution control laws, including the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. EPA has also taken issued a Notice of Violations against the landfill owners.

**Coal Ash Disposal and Environmental Justice:** Alabama’s coal ash ponds disproportionately impact low-income communities and communities of color. The EPA statistics show that more than 40 percent of the citizens living near coal ash ponds in Alabama are non-white. Also, about 25 percent of nearby residents are below the poverty line, which is more than twice the national average poverty rate of 11.9 percent.

**Information on Alabama Regulations**

Alabama represents the worst of the worst when it comes to coal-ash disposal. First, Alabama has no laws or regulations on the books to specifically ensure the safety of the state’s coal ash dams. It is the only state in the country without such laws. Because there are no federal laws to ensure dam safety, this essentially means that Alabama dams are completely unregulated. Until 2011, Alabama also completely exempted coal ash disposal in landfills. Consequently, coal ash from Alabama’s ten coal-fired plants has been dumped mostly in unlined, unregulated, and unmonitored ponds and landfills. New regulations pertaining to coal ash in Alabama improve the safeguards for newly constructed landfills, but the regulations do not apply to Alabama’s many existing coal ash landfills.

For more information, contact Lisa Evans, Senior Administrative Counsel, Earthjustice, levans@earthjustice.org, 781-631-4119.

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12 Id. at 40-41.