

TOXIC COAL ASH IN FLORIDA

Addressing Coal Plants' Hazardous Legacy

For decades, utilities disposed of coal ash – the hazardous substance left after burning coal for energy – by dumping it in unlined ponds and landfills. **Florida has 28 coal ash dumpsites.** Coal ash contains hazardous pollutants including arsenic, boron, cobalt, chromium, lead, lithium, mercury, molybdenum, radium, selenium, and other heavy metals, which have been linked to cancer, heart and thyroid disease, reproductive failure, and neurological harm. Industry's own data indicate that across the country 91% of coal plants are currently polluting groundwater above federal health standards with toxic pollutants.¹

Coal ash remains one of our nation's largest toxic industrial waste streams. U.S. coal plants continue to produce approximately 70 million tons every year.²

Despite EPA's 2015 Coal Ash Rule, which created the first-ever safeguards for coal ash disposal, many coal ash dumps remain unregulated due to sweeping exemptions for legacy coal ash ponds and inactive landfills. The exempted coal ash dumps are sited disproportionately in low-income communities and communities of color. The EPA will issue a proposed rule to address these exemptions in May 2023.

Florida utilities operate **15 federally regulated coal ash ponds and landfills** containing 16.7 million cubic yards of toxic waste at nine coal plants (Table 1). At all Florida plants, industry monitoring data indicate that groundwater is contaminated above federal safe standards.³ Despite the serious water contamination, no Florida plant, to date, has selected a final plan to clean up groundwater, as required by state and federal law.

Coal ash is leaching unsafe levels of toxic pollutants into groundwater at 91% of coal plants.

In addition, Florida hosts at least **13 unregulated inactive coal ash landfills and legacy ponds** that escape federal regulation (Table 2). The exact number remains unknown because utilities are not required to report these sites. These dumps are almost certainly

contaminating water and threatening health and the environment; however, monitoring data are not currently available for most unregulated sites.

As we anticipate EPA's proposed rule on legacy ponds and unregulated landfills in May 2023, a concern remains that the agency will not address coal ash that was dumped off site or used as fill.

Action Needed

The magnitude of harm from recklessly dumped toxic coal ash requires decisive action from federal and state regulators. Utilities must be required to comply with the law and immediately clean up their pollution.⁴ EPA and states must make enforcement a priority and act quickly to ensure that utilities leave communities with sites that benefit rather than harm their health, environment, and economic status. EPA must swiftly strengthen the Coal Ash Rule to address the many legacy ponds and inactive landfills that are unregulated, and to prohibit coal ash used as fill unless protective measures are put in place, to ensure all Florida communities are protected from coal ash pollution.

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Table 1: 15 Regulated Coal Ash Disposal Sites in Florida

Coal Plant	City	Owner	Coal Ash Dumps	Groundwater Contamination from Coal Ash Magnitude of exceedance above federal health-based guidelines ⁵
Big Bend*	Apollo Beach	TECO Energy	2 unlined ponds	Molybdenum (x2), Radium 226+228 (x7)
CD McIntosh	Chesterton	Lakeland Electric	1 landfill	Antimony (x1), Arsenic (x10), Boron (x1), Lithium (x77), Radium 226+228 (x11), Sulfate (x3)
Crystal River	Crystal River	Duke Energy	2 unlined ponds, 1 landfill	Arsenic (x144), Boron (x3), Lithium (x10), Molybdenum (x5), Radium 226+228 (x3), Sulfate (x2)
Deerhaven	Gainesville	Gainesville Reg Utilities	1 unlined pond, 1 landfill	Boron (x2), Lithium (x4), Molybdenum (x3), Radium 226+228 (x1)
OUC Stanton Energy Center	Orlando	Orlando Utilities Commission	1 landfill	Arsenic (x9), Cobalt (x3), Fluoride (x5), Lead (x1), Lithium (x4), Molybdenum (x1), Radium 226+228 (x3), Selenium (x2), Sulfate (x2)
Plant Crist	Pensacola	Gulf Power	1 unlined pond, 2 landfills	Boron (x34), Cadmium (x1), Cobalt (x10), Mercury (x2), Molybdenum (x34), Radium 226+228 (x5), Sulfate (x1)
Plant Smith	Southport	Gulf Power	1 unlined pond	Arsenic (x2), Boron (x9), Lithium (x5), Radium 226+228 (x9), Sulfate (x2)
Seminole	Palatka	Seminole Electric Coop	1 landfill	Boron (x2), Molybdenum (x2), Radium 226+228 (x2), Sulfate (x2)
St. Johns River	Jacksonville	Jacksonville Electric Auth	1 landfill	Boron (x17), Molybdenum (x2), Radium 226+228 (x2), Sulfate (x3)

* This plant operates inactive coal ash ponds at the facility but has not reported the ponds on its CCR Rule Compliance Data and Information website nor has the owner complied with the CCR rule’s requirements that apply to these ponds, including groundwater monitoring, closure, and corrective action.

For more information on regulated coal ash sites in Florida, see earthjustice.org/coalash/map.

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Table 2: 13 Unregulated Coal Ash Legacy Ponds and Inactive Landfills in Florida (ash dumps exempted from the 2015 Coal Ash Rule)⁶

Coal Plant or Landfill	City	Probable Owner / Source	# of Unregulated Ponds	# of Unregulated Landfills	Evidence of Site Contamination ⁷
Big Bend	Apollo Beach	TECO Energy	0	1	Yes – EPA damage case
CD McIntosh	Chesterton	Lakeland Electric	0	1	Yes – EPA damage case
Crystal River	Crystal River	Duke Energy	0	1	Yes – Industry data ^a
Plant Smith	Southport	Gulf Power	0	1	Yes – EPA damage case
Northside Generating Station	Jacksonville	Jacksonville Electric Authority	0	1	Yes – Industry data ^b
OUC Stanton Energy Center	Orlando	Orlando Utilities Commission	0	1	Yes – EPA damage case
Polk	Mulberry	TECO Energy	0	1	Unknown
Scholz	Sneads	Southern Company	3	0	Unknown
Seminole	Palatka	Seminole Electric Coop	0	1	Yes – EPA damage case
St. Johns River	Jacksonville	Jacksonville Electric Authority	0	2	Yes – Industry data ^a

^a Industry monitoring data posted on the plant's CCR Compliance Data and Information website.

^b Industry monitoring is the basis of a finding of contamination as described on Ashtracker.org.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Earthjustice and Environmental Integrity Project, “Poisonous Coverup, The Widespread Failure of the Power Industry to Clean Up Coal Ash Dumps,” available at <https://earthjustice.org/document/poisonous-coverup>.
- ² American Coal Ash Association, 2020 CCP Production and Use Survey Report, <https://aca-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/News-Release-Coal-Ash-Production-and-Use-2020.pdf>.
- ³ See endnote 1, “Poisonous Coverup,” *supra*, at Table A4, Summary of Contamination by Site.
- ⁴ See endnote 1, *supra*, for more information re widespread utility non-compliance with the 2015 Coal Ash Rule.
- ⁵ All data derived from the utilities’ publicly accessible [CCR Compliance Data and Information websites](#), and exceedances were calculated by Environmental Integrity Project.
- ⁶ These data were developed by using EPA datasets relied upon in their 2007 and 2014 CCR risk assessments (Human and Ecological Risk Assessment of Coal Combustion Residuals) and comparing those datasets to the universe of regulated units.
- ⁷ “EPA damage case” denotes a site where US EPA has found documented groundwater contamination from coal ash. See: <https://www.regulations.gov/document?EPA-HQ-RCRA-2009-0640-12123>.

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