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## OEC Praises ODNR Pledge to Step up Inspection of Ohio's Coal Ash Ponds in Wake of Billion Gallon Spill of Toxic Coal Waste in Tennessee

Environmental group urges ODNR to go further, require coal companies to install “early warning” technologies at existing lagoons, take other actions

Columbus, OH – The Ohio Environmental Council is praising the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) for its announcement this week that it plans to step up new inspections and review past inspections of 20 coal ash waste ponds in Ohio.

The environmental-conservation group is calling for even further action, including a ban on any new coal-slurry waste impoundments. A mining company has proposed damming a pristine creek in Belmont County to store 1.85 billion gallons of slurry waste.

“We salute ODNR for acting to head off a Tennessee-type disaster from happening here,” said David R. Celebrezze, OEC Director of Air and Water Special Projects. “Stepping up inspections is the first step to ensuring the integrity of Ohio’s waters. The next step for protection is real-time monitoring and a halt to the construction of any new slurry lagoons like those that have plagued Ohio with repeated leaks.”

The ODNR announced the move in the wake of last month’s collapse of an earthen dam in eastern Tennessee that spilled more than a billion gallons of toxic-laced coal ash. The coal waste spread over hundreds of acres, up to six feet deep in some places.

Like the Tennessee impoundment, the Ohio ash ponds are maintained by electric utility companies to contain solid waste byproducts left from the burning of coal. This waste commonly is laced with toxic compounds, including arsenic, lead, and cadmium.

In addition to the 20 ash ponds operated by utility companies, Ohio also has eight active coal slurry lagoons operated by coal mining companies. The eight coal company lagoons contain millions of gallons of coal slurry—sediment and coal fines left over when coal is washed after mined from the earth. The ash and slurry ponds are located mostly in Southern Ohio, including Adams, Belmont, Brown, Clermont, Coshocton, Gallia, Hamilton, Jefferson, Montgomery, Pickaway, and Washington counties.

The Ohio Environmental Council is calling on the ODNR to take the following actions:

- Hire more state inspectors to step up safety inspections of all of Ohio's coal ash and coal slurry impoundments and coal waste disposal piles.
- Require utility and coal companies to install "early warning," real-time monitoring technologies at all coal ash and coal slurry impoundments to instantaneously detect spills and prevent them from becoming a disaster.
- Require all coal ash and coal slurry impoundment operators to file updated spill prevention and containment plans.
- Call a halt to the construction of any new coal slurry impoundments.

The Captina Creek watershed in Belmont County has experienced a series of spills of coal slurry waste in recent years:

- In February, 2008, a slurry spill darkened miles of Captina Creek before the waste emptied into the Ohio River, 22 miles downstream from the spill site. State regulators hit Ohio Valley Coal Co. with a series of violations for the illegal release from a mine site near Alledonia, Ohio. The spill has attracted a surge of investigators from the ODNR, Ohio EPA, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, U.S. EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration.
- In August, 2005, a slurry pipe ruptured, dumping 30,000 gallons of coal waste from a nearby mine owned by American Energy Corporation into Captina Creek, killing fish and other wildlife. ODNR issued a record \$50,000 fine to the company for the illegal release and resulting fish kill.
- In 2000, a slurry spill fouled Perkins Run, a tributary to Captina Creek. Ohio Valley Coal Co. agreed to a \$100,000 civil penalty levied by the Ohio EPA.

Ironically, the Ohio EPA has rated Captina Creek as one of the most pristine waterways in Ohio. Some researchers believe it is one of the last remaining streams in Ohio clean enough to support a reproducing population of the endangered Eastern Hellbender salamander.

“The coal industry likely will resist any increase in oversight, especially of ‘the other waste ponds’—the coal slurry impoundments,” predicted Celebrezze. “The industry probably will noisily point out that coal slurry is different than coal ash, which is true. If pressed about the series of slurry leaks documented in Belmont County, they’ll probably lawyer up and go silent. But a spill is still a spill, no matter what the waste.”

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio’s leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio’s families and communities. For more information, visit [www.theOEC.org](http://www.theOEC.org).