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Tennessee earthen dam gives way to 500 million gallons of coal waste-Is Ohio next?

Coal waste can choke streams, impact water supply, and harm wildlife

COLUMBUS, OHIO – An earthen retaining wall broke on Monday in Tennessee releasing a half a billion gallon coal waste juggernaut. The coal waste pummeled houses and public property as it finally crawled to a stop after covering 400 acres, up to six feet high in some places.

“This should be the final nail in the coffin for the building of any new coal slurry impoundments in Ohio,” said David R. Celebrezze, of the Ohio Environmental Council. “We can play Russian roulette that these impoundments won’t give way, but it’s a dangerous game that the only loser will be our communities.”

“This is not only about protecting wildlife and our water supply,” says Celebrezze, “It is about protecting our health.”

This Tennessee spill is ample evidence that the Strickland Administration should continue resisting the proposed construction of a 1.85 billion gallon slurry impoundment at Casey Run. If an impoundment of this size were to fail, it would more than twice the size of the Tennessee spill.

It is likely that the coal industry will resist no new impoundments and community protections, but this Tennessee spill highlights the fallacy of the argument that it was probably safe a day before.

In the wake of Monday’s massive spill, the OEC calls on the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to:

- Prevent any new proposed construction of new coal slurry impoundments.
- Re-inspect Ohio’s current impoundments for safety.
- Develop an “early warning system” by installing real-time monitoring technologies to stop a spill from becoming a disaster.
- Increase the number of inspectors.
- Require coal operators to file updated effective spill prevention and containment plans.

The Tennessee spill will cost millions to clean up. An ounce of prevention here in Ohio can save millions.

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (www.theOEC.org) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is a network of more than 100 local and state environmental-conservation organizations.