



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only.

---

## Coal ash pond failure here could be four times worse for Kinston, Neuse River

*By Wes Wolfe / Staff Writer*

*Published: Sunday, March 16, 2014 at 18:39 PM.*

Toxic chemicals threatening the drinking water, gray sludge destroying marine life – it's a reality for Dan River communities downriver from Duke Energy's Eden coal ash spill.

It could just as easily have been the Neuse River.

The H.F. Lee Plant just west of Goldsboro generated electricity from coal from 1951 to 2012, as the resulting hundreds of millions of gallons of coal ash were dumped into multiple ponds, including what's called the Active Ash 1980 Pond.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency classifies the pond as a significant hazard, and state regulators believe it has a high risk of failure – the same as at the Dan River station.

The Southern Environmental Law Center – whose potential suit of Duke Energy in 2013 spurred the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources to action – sees an immediate problem in that the ponds are unlined, which can lead to the leaking of toxic chemicals.

"It does not take, as Aretha Franklin would say, it doesn't take a doctor with degrees to know if you store a toxic substance in an unlined hole in the ground, next to a waterway, you will contaminate groundwater," said SELC attorney Frank Holleman at the Rotary Club of Kinston on Thursday.

He continued, "And, every site in North Carolina and South Carolina where this substance is stored in this way – 14 sites in North Carolina – groundwater is being contaminated. To make it worse, this millions of tons of this substance is stored either dry or wet – mostly wet in big lagoons – and it's held back from the waterway only by earthen dykes that leak."

Holleman said the basic process that needs to be done is move the coal ash to dry, lined landfills not unlike landfills used to store average household refuse.

However, any immediate action is delayed pending negotiations between Duke Energy and DENR.

A federal criminal grand jury is investigating whether there are or have been improper actions involving Duke Energy, DENR and Gov. Pat McCrory, who worked for Duke Energy for 29 years.

Plans worked out currently stand for Duke Energy to move coal ash from Asheville, the Riverbend site near Charlotte, and to reopen the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for those sites along with the sites at Dan River and the Sutton plant near Wilmington.

"In a March 12 letter, Duke Energy responded to a demand for information from Gov. McCrory and me. Although Duke committed to near-term actions, the response lacked the detail necessary to ensure Duke Energy abides by the commitments outlined in their letter," said DENR Secretary John Skvarla in a statement Friday. "Reopening these permits allows DENR to ensure that Duke Energy resolves this long-standing issue at these facilities."

But, procedures elsewhere remain uncertain.

"We're doing in-depth inspections at all 14 facilities," Duke Energy spokeswoman Susan Massengale said. "We started doing them early this week, and that process is continuing, so we're looking at all kinds of details – taking photographs, doing all kinds of detailed observations at all of these facilities, and that may change what shows up as part of the substance of these actions anyhow."

"Right now, I think everything is kind of on hold while these other processes go forward."

Massengale said any immediate threat discovered would be dealt with, but that most of the issues around the 14 sites in the state are of a more long-term nature.

Wes Wolfe can be reached at 252-559-1075 and [Wes.Wolfe@Kinston.com](mailto:Wes.Wolfe@Kinston.com). Follow him on Twitter @WolfeReports.

Copyright © 2014 <http://www.kinston.com> — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.