



# MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
DECEMBER 22, 2009

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## **STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT COMPLETES HEALTH ASSESSMENT OF KINGSTON COAL ASH SPILL SITE**

*Public Comments Accepted Through February 9, 2010*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Department of Health's (TDH) Environmental Epidemiology Program, under a cooperative agreement with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), has completed a draft health assessment for Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) Kingston coal ash spill site and is accepting public comments now through February 9, 2010, it was recently announced. Both the 200-page assessment and a four-page fact sheet summary are available on the department's Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/coalashspill.htm>.

"We understand local residents' concern about the potential health implications of the coal ash spill," said Bonnie Bashor, director of the Environmental Epidemiology Program. "It's the department's responsibility and mission to protect the health of the people in Roane County. With this in mind, the department took very seriously the review and analysis of collected data to determine any health risks associated with coal ash exposure."

Details about the department's participation in a Roane County community public meeting to answer questions about the draft health assessment will be announced soon. The meeting is anticipated to be held in January 2010.

The fact sheet outlines the public health assessment (PHA) process and next steps, and lists all of the environmental data sets used in writing the PHA. The full public health assessment includes a summary, discussion, conclusions, recommendations and a public health action plan. Environmental data from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), TVA and others are presented in the report.

Highlights of the conclusions reached in the report are as follows:

- No harm to the community's health is expected from touching the coal ash. Even though touching the coal ash could cause local skin irritation, the metals in the ash are not likely to get into people's bodies from merely touching the coal ash.
- Using municipal drinking water from the Kingston and Rockwood water treatment plants will not harm people's health because the raw and finished water have continuously met drinking water standards. Also, using well or spring water within four miles of the coal ash release will not harm people's health from exposure to coal ash or metals in the coal ash because no evidence has been found for groundwater contamination by coal ash.

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- Using the Emory River at the site of the coal ash release (near Emory River mile 2) could result in harm to residents or trespassers from physical hazards associated with cleanup efforts and from the volume of ash present, if residents or trespassers entered the area. No harm to people's health should result from recreational use of the Emory, Clinch and Tennessee Rivers outside the area of the lower Emory River down to the confluence of the Emory and Clinch Rivers, as specified in the recreational advisory and river closure. As the advisory indicates, people are advised to avoid areas where they see ash, however, even if it is outside the area of immediate impact. Previous fish advisories should be followed.
- Breathing ambient air near the coal ash release is not expected to harm people's health as long as adequate dust suppression measures are in place. No harm to people's health is expected from occasionally breathing coal ash if it should become airborne for short periods of time. If dust suppression measures should fail and particulate matter is present in concentrations greater than National Ambient Air Quality Standards due to the coal ash becoming airborne for periods longer than one day, the department concludes that particulate matter from airborne coal ash could harm people's health, especially for those persons with pre-existing respiratory or heart conditions.

The draft PHA has already undergone government review by Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, TDEC, ATSDR and EPA to ensure the accuracy of the data and science used in the report. Also involved in the review of the assessment were the Tennessee Poison Center and Oak Ridge Associated Universities. The ATSDR has provided the report to three outside, independent reviewers for scientific peer review as well.

Comments must be submitted in writing. Submit via e-mail to [EEP.Health@tn.gov](mailto:EEP.Health@tn.gov) or mail to:

Environmental Epidemiology Program  
Tennessee Department of Health  
1st Floor, Cordell Hull Building  
425 5th Avenue North  
Nashville TN 37243

December 22, 2009 marks one year since the coal ash spill, where a retaining wall failed at the TVA Kingston Fossil Plant in Roane County, Tenn. More than 5.4 million cubic yards of coal ash spilled from an on-site holding pond to cover more than 300 acres of surrounding land and water.

TDEC serves as the state's lead agency to contain the immediate threat to human health and the environment. TDH continues to play a critical role in working with TDEC and assessing and ensuring ongoing public health protection. In the weeks following the spill, TDH went door-to-door to conduct a health survey and to share information with area residents. The department provided information to area medical practitioners. TDH operates the state lab that analyzes all the samples collected by TDEC, and provides health assessors to determine whether adverse health effects are likely based on the data.

On May 11, the United States Environmental Protection Agency signed an enforceable agreement with TVA to oversee the removal of coal ash at the TVA Kingston Plant. The state of Tennessee welcomed this action and continues to work in partnership with EPA to ensure the cleanup in Roane County is thorough and protective of public health and the environment.

For more information on the involvement of TDH in protecting residents' health in the aftermath of the Kingston coal ash spill, visit the Web at <http://health.state.tn.us/coalashspill.htm>. For more information on the Environmental Epidemiology Program, visit the Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/environmental/index.htm>.

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This news release can be accessed online at <https://news.tennesseeanytime.org/taxonomy/term/30>.