

What's Being Said About Coal Ash Basin Closures

The electric power industry is beginning to permanently close, where applicable, the basins where coal ash is stored, in ways that put safety first, protect the environment, minimize the impacts to communities, and manage costs for customers.

Basins can be closed in one of two ways: managing coal ash in place (closed-in-place) or excavating and moving coal ash to another location (closed-by-removal). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognizes that both options are viable and provide environmental benefits, and the electric power industry is committed to meeting or exceeding all federal, state, and local regulations.

Each basin closure is unique, and there are site-specific requirements that must be met at each basin. The industry is committed to closing basins safely, implementing thorough safeguards that protect the environment and our communities. Some of these safeguards include:

- Basin water testing and treatment
- Groundwater monitoring and, where applicable, corrective action
- Qualified professional engineering methods
- The transparent publication of all basin closure plans

Here is a sample of what's being said around the country about coal ash basins closing.

Alliances, Associations, and Regulatory Agencies

“Cap-in-place requires coal-ash ponds to be safely drained and covered with a waterproof liner, with nearby groundwater monitored for at least 30 years. The cap-in-place option minimizes effects to electricity rates.”

Tom Reeder, Assistant Secretary for the Environment, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), [The News & Observer](#), July 25, 2016

In response to the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA's) plan to close basins in place: “Overall, EPA concurs with the TVA's preferred alternative to close identified facilities in place, according to the CCR rule.”

*U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,
[Letter to TVA on the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement](#), June 21, 2016*

On Georgia Power's plan to close-in-place: “This is good news for the people of Georgia...It is a significant move and it does appear to be comprehensive.”

*Stephen Smith, Executive Director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy,
the [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#), June 13, 2016*

On the dewatering process: “We haven't seen any evidence of harm to the environment. We're pretty confident that how we've been handling it all these years has been appropriate.”

*Ann Regn, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ),
as quoted in the [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#), June 10, 2016*

“Western Governors assert that the Western states have effective regulatory infrastructure in place to continue as the principal regulatory authorities, ensuring protection of human health and the environment through the safe and secure management of CCRs under state solid waste, groundwater protection and coal mine regulatory programs.”

*Western Governors Association (WGA),
[Resolution on the Regulation of Coal Combustion Residuals](#), March 3, 2014*

In The News

“Forcing utility companies to spend billions relocating coal ash would shut down many coal-fired power plants. That would send electricity prices soaring and severely impact factories, hospitals, schools, poor families and others. Workers would be laid off or forced to take multiple lower-paying, part-time jobs.”

*Paul Driessen, Senior Policy Analyst, Committee For A Constructive Tomorrow,
[The Washington Times](#), August 26, 2016*

“Environmental activists have recently sought to require utilities to completely remediate areas holding coal ash by excavating and removing nearly 3 million tons of coal ash indicating that nothing short of digging it all up will suffice. Yet the environmental benefits of such an approach are not so clear. For example, at least one utility has said that a complete excavation would cost utility customers in excess of \$3 billion and require 1.6 million trips by trucks to complete removal of coal ash from its areas. Such a monumental undertaking might not have been contemplated when the federal government thought it would be a good idea to cap or remove coal ash. Yet the reality is although some ideas seem well-intentioned, the environmental impacts caused by a cleanup [closure-by-removal], and the resulting amount of impact on the transportation infrastructure seem surreal. Thus the actual cleanup [may] cause significant traffic congestion and wear and tear to roads, highways, and bridges [B]ut [has] anyone . . . considered the greenhouse gas emissions which will be caused by loading and transporting \$1.6 million loads of ash?”

*Brigham A. McCown, former Senior Executive at the U.S. Department of Transportation,
[Forbes](#), August 11, 2016*

“The Tennessee Valley Authority made the responsible choice in opting to cap its existing ash ponds at its coal plants instead of excavating them and sending the sludge to landfills Removing the ash would eliminate the environmental concerns at the site, but it also would carry greater safety concerns — trucks can crash and trains can derail — and much higher costs The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed with TVA that closure-in-place should be the preferred alternative.”

[Knoxville News Sentinel Editorial](#), August 7, 2016

“The additional risk imposed by excavating and transporting ash from one location to another can easily exceed the potential risk posed by leaving the ash in place. Risk drivers include the statistical certainty of traffic fatalities and injuries. Likewise, excavation results in ecological disturbance, ongoing site releases from ash disturbance for years and broader environmental effects from resource use and emissions. These should be calculated and considered before embarking on the mass movement of tens of millions of tons of material throughout our neighborhoods, highways and railways.”

*Dr. John Daniels, Chair, National Ash Management Advisory Board,
and Professor, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UNC Charlotte,
[The News & Observer](#), June 2, 2016*

