

# You Can Help

- Contact your State Senators and Delegates to tell them you are concerned about coal sludge impoundments.
- Join our call for an end to coal sludge impoundments and coal sludge injection.
- Learn more about coal sludge impoundments: [www.sludgesafety.org](http://www.sludgesafety.org).
- Educate your family, neighbors and community.
- Contact SSP to volunteer to help. Contact 304-522-0246 or [info@sludgesafety.org](mailto:info@sludgesafety.org).



Tests revealed high levels of mercury in water seeping from the bottom of a coal sludge impoundment in Mingo County. The seeps flow into Rockhouse Fork, which flows into Tug Fork, which flows into the Ohio. We all live downstream!



Join residents across West Virginia in working to prevent coal sludge disasters.



## Sludge Safety Project

*A Project of Coal River Mountain Watch,  
Concerned Citizens in Mingo County and  
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition*

Contact SSP  
304-522-0246  
P.O. Box 6753  
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[www.sludgesafety.org](http://www.sludgesafety.org)

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*Photo: Oct. 2000 coal sludge impoundment disaster*

*Breaks in coal slurry impoundments can threaten the lives and health of area residents, destroy homes and businesses and contaminate water supplies. This dangerous potential looms over coal mining regions in West Virginia and throughout Appalachia.*

*--Senator Robert C. Byrd.*

**Together, Making Our  
Communities Safer**

# What are coal sludge impoundments?

Near their mining operations, coal companies construct dams from mine refuse, often at the heads of hollows. The dams hold liquid waste – slurry or sludge – produced after washing and processing coal. Solids settle to the bottom, while water at the top is reused or discharged.

Sludge contains carcinogenic chemicals used to process coal. It also contains toxic heavy metals that are present in coal, which are released when mined and mixed with water. These include mercury, lead, arsenic, selenium, chromium, cadmium and boron.

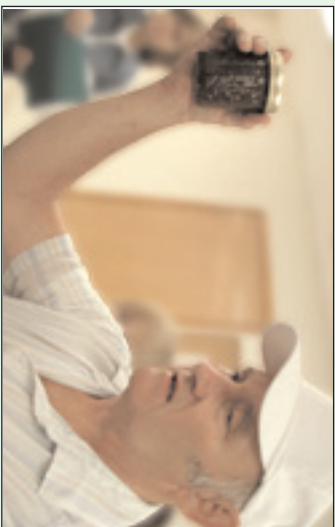


A Massey Energy sludge impoundment above Marsh Fork Elementary.

West Virginians know that coal sludge dams are very dangerous. In 1972, a coal waste dam failed at Buffalo Creek, killing 125 people.

## Impoundments Still Dangerous

While today's impoundments aren't likely to suffer catastrophic failure of the dam face, they are much larger and more numerous. Citizens worry that impoundments will unleash a tidal wave of sludge onto downstream communities, as happened in 2000 at Kentucky's largest mountaintop removal operation.



A Mingo Co. resident displays his blackened tap water. He and his neighbors had clean well water before the underground injection of sludge began. With so many neighbors sick, residents believe their once-pure water is now poisoning them.

309 million gallons of lava-like black sludge gushed out of the bottom of the impoundment, burying gardens and yards – at some points 15 feet deep, elsewhere up to 70 yards wide – and killing fish and other aquatic life. EPA officials called it the worst environmental disaster ever in the Southeast. Miraculously, no people died, but 75 miles of waterways were contaminated. Residents say the toxic sludge still lingers.

Across the coalfields, "blackwater" releases occur frequently, fouling streams and ground-water.

Also, coal companies intentionally inject sludge into abandoned underground mines at hundreds of sites across the state. A

Mingo County lawsuit alleges that a Massey Energy coal processing facility injected sludge for at least eight years without a permit. Subpoenaed documents show the company was injecting as much as 28 million gallons a month of coal sludge underground. Many area residents believe their well water – and subsequently their health – has been ruined by the injected slurry. Residents near other impoundments are also worried about underground slurry injection.

## Impoundments Not Necessary

*Coal sludge impoundments are not necessary. Some coal companies are using alternative, dry methods to dispose of coal waste. While slightly more expensive than sludge "ponds," the extra cost is more than worth it to ensure the safety of people living downstream.*

## Project Goals:

- Improve safety for those living in the shadows of sludge "ponds."
- Shut down the most dangerous impoundments.
- Improve water quality for all West Virginians.
- Demand alternative methods of coal-waste disposal.
- Eliminate coal sludge impoundments.