

Coal Slurry Impoundments
Another By-Product of Mountaintop Removal
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition

Horrors and Seeds for Repeating History

Buffalo Creek Disaster (1972) Dams broke, 125 dead, Pittston Coal Co. claims this was an “act of God.” Then WV Gov. Arch Moore limited media access to disaster area.

Virginia (1990’s) had 2 very serious slurry impoundment releases (MSHA contends they had to act because OSM was not).

OSM (1996) criticized West Virginia’s deletion of impoundments in mining regs, then did nothing.

Martin Co KY disaster (2000), at a mountaintop removal site, media denied access, West Virginia officials largely hide in their bunkers, no solid oversight of WV facilities with readily available data for risk determinations from these colossal waste sites and potential time bombs.

Martin County, Kentucky Slurry Release from mountaintop removal site (10/11/2000)

EPA official calls this “one of the worst environmental disasters in history in the southeastern United States.” The spill resulted when slurry broke into an underground mine and spewed out the hillsides. Note, the dam did not break, which is good, as less than 15% of slurry leaked!

The Ostrich Syndrome, Complicity with Polluters, or Sludge R Us?

Gov. Underwood – Delayed response (2 weeks after catastrophe) announces task force to ID WV’s potential problems (already underway led by federal agencies, MSHA et al).

US Rep. Wise – Not sure spill 20 times bigger than the Exxon Valdez is a major disaster.

US Rep. Rahal – Finally joined request for federal funds to study impoundments (10/19).

US Sen Byrd – Missing in action?

US Rep. Rogers (KY) – Immediate call for the American Academy of Sciences to evaluate impoundments (to be paid for using \$2,000,000 in federal funds—taxpayers money) and identify better methods to dispose of mine waste.

Learning Disabilities - Courtesy of Coal?

Is the lack of prompt, decisive action from WV elected officials rooted in coal?

***Are we receiving lead (neurotoxin) supplements,
courtesy of coal-fired power plants?***

John Amos power plant pumped:

44 tons of lead into the air (1998 alone)

12 tons of mercury into the air (1998 alone)

These cause brain damage, are likely present in the witch’s brew of sludge. (OVER)

The Numbers (Sludge and Slurry)

250,000,000 gallon of water and toxic sludge release by Massey's Martin Co. Coal Company
100,000 dollars Ashland KY spent immediately for back up water (one municipality)
100,000 dollars maximum fine for 4 violations assessed to coal company by KY officials
7,500 gallons per minute Marathon-Ashland refinery requires (of clean water)
5,000 dollars/acre maximum bond on WV impoundment (microscopic compared to liability)
3,000 gallons/tanker trucks, 10 filled/day/crew, 10 crews sucking sludge out of Wolf Creek
(and it's still coated over its entire length, not to mention another 100 miles of creeks, rivers)
also... Costs galore (municipal, emergency response, agency hours and travel, industrial and commercial slow downs, schools shut down, hospitals looking for backup systems, long term cleanup costs, any litigation with coal company, etc)

600 ppm* sulfates at Fort Gay WV (limit is 250 ppm, water system can't treat sulfate)
500 foot increase in dam, Massey proposed at Omar WV impoundment (Island Creek)
499 acres can be added to existing slurry dam permit without \$.01 increase in bond
336 hours delay before WV Governor calls for assessing WV sites and risks
100 miles (at least) of streams and rivers horribly damaged by KY release
63 WV slurry impoundments, OSM** database as of 10/26 (with no size, volume, etc.)
30 impoundments in Boone, Logan, McDowell, and Mingo Cos. (per OSM)
25 high risk slurry impoundments in WV according to MSHA*** (as of 10/26/00)
7 sludge disposal ponds along Coldwater Creek (before roadblock, @ 10/26/00)
2 roadblocks (Wolf, Coldwater) 15 days after spill, **denying media access**
1 April warning to WV Surface Mine Appeal Board (at risky WV impoundment)

Data Availability (as of 10/26/2000 requests and responses)

0 location maps of WV impoundments (OSM-DC, OSM-Chas, DEP-OWR/OMM)
0 list of approved chemicals for use in coal cleaning (OSM or DEP)
0 chemical data made available on sludge to the public or several cleanup workers

(OVEC members interviewed several on site workers on 10/26. Note that metals and carcinogenic acrylamides are possibly present in the witch's brew.)

Actions

Demand OSM step forward to prevent future catastrophes (and act on their clear understanding that WV program is less restrictive than federal law requires).

Demand WV bonds – retroactive, based on costs associated with KY cleanup.

Demand new penalties - at least equal to costs to taxpayers.

***Demand ban on head-of-hollow slurry dams
(place dried wastes back in abandoned underground mines)***

*Parts per million

** Federal Office of Surface Mining

***Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration