



Kinaston Spill Update



The Copeland family lived in this home for four decades, until it was destroyed in the Kingston Spill.

Photo Source: Knoxville News Sentinel

After the massive [Kingston coal ash spill](#) in 2008, the U.S. EPA led remediation efforts to mitigate the 1 billion gallons of ash spilled over 300 acres and into two rivers.

Coordinating with TN Department of Environmental Conservation (TDEC) and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), EPA developed a clean up plan, including removing ash from the nearby Emory River by dredging. During short-term cleanup efforts, more than 3.5 million cubic yards of ash was removed from Emory River and shipped to a landfill in Perry County, AL; an unlined, unregulated landfill located next door to low-income and minority communities. The

coal ash in the uncovered Perry County landfill is piled as high as 60 feet, spreading dangerous dust and pollution to nearby homes. Final short-term cleanup activities at Kingston are expected to end in November 2014 – 7 years after the spill.

In November 2012, both EPA and the TDEC signed off on TVA's Phase 3 cleanup plan – known as "Monitored Natural Recovery" – that would rely on natural river processes to disperse or cover up the ash remaining in the Clinch and Emory Rivers. EPA agreed with TVA and TDEC that further dredging in the Clinch and Emory Rivers would only lead to [dissemination of dangerous radioactive pollution](#), like Cesium-137, from operations at Oak Ridge National Lab dating back to the 1950s. Instead, TVA will monitor the remaining ash in more than 200 acres of the Clinch and Emory Rivers over the next 30 years.

This means that more than 510,000 cubic yards of coal ash remains in the surrounding water bodies, permanently altering the ecosystem and damaging the health of aquatic organisms. Those who live and recreate in and around these rivers will be unable to use these waters without fear of being exposed to these toxic metals through swimming or fishing. Much like those who were permanently displaced after their properties were destroyed by this disaster, the lives of those living in the area will never be the same.

TVA has begun to conduct [monthly tours](#) (the 4th Tuesday of each month) of the Kingston site that include a brief update on the progress to-date and a driving tour of the site outside the exclusion zone.

Related Legal Action:

More than 60 lawsuits have been filed against TVA representing more than 800 plaintiffs. In August 2012, a U.S. District Judge found TVA negligent due to the location and design of the Kingston plant's six-story coal ash pond and the practice of repeated vertical expansions and faulty maintenance, which ultimately caused the failure of the ash pond. TVA has purchased about 180 properties that were permanently destroyed by the spill. Although TVA has already settled about 200 individual legal claims, it will continue to incur legal costs for years to come.

In August 2013, former cleanup [workers filed suit](#) against the contractor TVA hired to oversee worker safety during cleanup of the spill. This suit alleges that the contractor knew coal ash contained toxic, hazardous substances but lied to workers about the dangers of being exposed to coal ash. Workers allege working at the Kingston site caused significant health impacts, ranging from heart ailments to respiratory issues to skin rashes.

The long-term effects to the surrounding ecosystem and public health remain to be seen. In the end, TVA's negligent handling of coal ash caused irreparable damage to the environment and to the lives of those who lived in the path of the spill – and TVA will never be able to adequately right these wrongs.

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