



**For immediate release:**

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**Contact:**

- Elizabeth Crowe, KEF, 859-986-0868
- Steve Wilkins, KFTC, 859-986-9506
- Wallace McMullen, Sierra Club, 502-228-016

## **Fiscal problems compound threat to drinking water posed by toxic coal-ash waste** *Coal-plant permit irrational in light of EKPC financial mess*

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WINCHESTER, Ky. – Just days after the Kentucky Public Service Commission issued warnings about East Kentucky Power Cooperative’s dire financial condition, a federal agency is now taking comments on a permit that would allow the co-op to dump toxic coal-ash waste from a proposed coal-burning power plant in Clark County into tributaries that feed the Kentucky River.

“On one hand, financial experts are saying that EKPC’s horrible financial condition makes it incapable of carrying out a billion-dollar project like the Smith plant and all but telling them to find a less risky alternative to the coal plant,” said Elizabeth Crowe, director of the Kentucky Environmental Foundation. “Yet, on the other, the permitting process for the plant blindly marches on. It’s like a game, with risks to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the bills we pay determined by a regulatory roll of the dice.

“We need our government agencies to step in and say no to the Smith plant, so we can all focus on practical, win-win solutions.”

Friday marked the opening of the comment period for a permit EKPC needs from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to dredge and fill rivers, streams and wetlands for the proposed Smith plant. Among the many water-related impacts being considered in the permit are plans to spread hazardous coal-ash waste across 236 acres of the plant site, including dumping it into a number of stream channels.

Ash from the first 12 years of the plant’s operation would cover an estimated area 10 football fields in size under a pile of waste 30 stories tall. Plans then call for dumping the ash waste from the next two decades of operation or more, which could easily be double that volume, into two on-site landfills. Under current Kentucky law, a liner is not required for such disposal, even though the EPA is now considering categorizing coal-ash as hazardous waste.

Coal combustion waste consists of ash from burning coal, along with the waste and residue from smokestack scrubbers and filters. It contains hazardous chemicals including arsenic, boron,

cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury, selenium and thallium, which have been shown to cause cancer and organ damage and been linked to brain damage in children.

EKPC's plans for coal-ash waste from the Smith plant call for dumping it directly into a number of streams that eventually flow into the Kentucky River upstream of the respective intakes for the drinking water supplies of Winchester and Lexington. As detailed in the Corps permit, there is no indication that liners or other barriers would be used to prevent chemicals in the ash from seeping into the ground and migrating downstream or into groundwater.

Miranda Brown, who grew in Clark County just outside Winchester, has grave concerns about contamination from coal-ash waste.

"We get our drinking water from the river, and downstream from where the ash will be dumped," said Brown, currently a junior at Murray State University who will be heading home for the summer when classes are over. "I am definitely concerned about arsenic and mercury. This is an unnecessary risk that we shouldn't be taking. We can save so much energy through efficiency and things like weatherization, which would eliminate the need for a plant that is such a threat to public health."

Findings from an analysis made public last week show that heavy metals and other toxic chemicals are seeping from dozens of ash-disposal ponds and coal-ash landfills in Kentucky. The study, conducted by the engineering firm Global Environmental LLC, determined that contamination of groundwater near the waste sites is consistent with the chemicals found in coal-ash waste.

Notably, the report found that coal-ash waste from one of EKPC's other power plants was leaking from the landfill where it is stored. According to the report, arsenic has migrated from the Spurlock coal plant waste site near the Ohio River and into surrounding groundwater, where it was measured at up to 16 times the level deemed safe for human health and 121 times greater than natural background levels. As with the proposal for EKPC's Smith plant, the Spurlock ash landfill is lined only with a layer of clay.

"There is a reason the EPA is considering treating coal-ash as a hazardous waste," said Wallace McMullen, chair of the Sierra Club's Cumberland Chapter Energy Committee. "It's toxic, and dumping it into streams that provide us with drinking water is a serious, serious risk to public health."

"Regardless of whether there are liners at ash-waste sites, it's better to think about a solution to our energy needs such as clean energy and efficiency that doesn't leach heavy metals and toxic chemicals into our water."

The Corps of Engineers is accepting comments on the water pollution permit through May 22. A public hearing on the permit has been scheduled for June 8 in Winchester.

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