



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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State environmental agency investigating wastewater discharge at site of coal ash spill

RALEIGH – The N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources is investigating a discharge of wastewater to the Dan River from an emergency piping system Duke Energy installed Feb. 9 in response to a coal ash spill at the company's retired Dan River power plant in Eden.

The company reports that the wastewater discharge did not include any coal ash and that the company took immediate action to stop the discharge when it was discovered.

Duke Energy reported to DENR and the EPA that less than 1,000 gallons of wastewater reached the Dan River from an emergency piping system the company installed during its response to the coal ash spill. Duke installed the emergency piping system Feb. 9 to divert wastewater away from the coal ash pond that failed and into a separate, working coal ash pond at the Dan River Steam Station.

The company reported that the newly constructed emergency piping system, at one point, did not work as intended and a backflow from the emergency system got into an existing pipe connection at the site and discharged into the Dan River. Duke reported to environmental regulators that the wastewater released from the emergency piping system to the Dan River contained yard drainage water, basement sump water and treated domestic wastewater from sources outside either coal ash lagoon. The company reported that the existing pipe through which the back flow occurred was plugged when the company discovered the problem to avoid further discharges to the river.

The company reported that wastewater from the emergency piping system did not intersect with the coal ash waste and, therefore, the company reports that no coal ash waste made its way into the Dan River during the wastewater spill.

An unpermitted discharge of wastewater into waters of the state, such as the Dan River, is a violation of the Clean Water Act, which is enforced by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. DENR's investigation of this wastewater discharge will be included in the probe the state is conducting of the coal ash spill and any subsequent enforcement actions.

It should also be noted that state and federal environmental regulators are responding to concerns regarding discharges and oddly colored rocks at a separate outfall near the failed coal ash basin. The EPA investigated the outfall yesterday and determined that the accumulation was naturally occurring iron bacteria or iron residue, which left the rocks with an orange color. EPA collected surface water and sediment samples to verify these conclusions. While all sampling was halted due to the weather Thursday, DENR plans to sample the water at this same site as soon as possible and will also continue its sediment and water quality sampling in the Dan River as weather permits.

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