

Gov. McCrory directs Duke Energy to bring coal ash spill under control

McCrory travels with his environmental agency staff to spill site in Eden

RALEIGH – North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory traveled to the site of the coal ash spill in Eden Thursday to direct Duke Energy to take all needed measures to control the spill so cleanup efforts can begin as soon as possible.

“This is a very serious spill and we need to get it under control as quickly as possible,” McCrory said. “Our top priorities are ensuring the health and safety of the public as well as the wildlife in the Dan River vicinity and the river itself, and the best way to do that is to get this controlled and cleaned up.”

A break Sunday afternoon in a stormwater pipe beneath an ash basin at the retired Dan River Steam Station in Eden caused a release of ash basin water and ash into the Dan River. Duke Energy estimates that initially 50,000-to-82,000 tons of ash was released to the river as a result of the break in the 48-inch stormwater pipe at the power plant. The company is working on a new estimate. The company also estimates that between 24 and 27 million gallons of basin water has reached the river.

As of Thursday afternoon, downstream municipal water supplies remain unaffected and are reporting that drinking water in their communities is safe to drink.

McCrory was joined on the site Thursday by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ Secretary John Skvarla, the N.C. Division of Water Resources Director Tom Reeder and other senior staff in DENR.

“My staff in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has provided a thorough and comprehensive response to this spill,” McCrory said. “They have been on site since we were notified of the incident to monitor water quality, provide guidance and evaluate conditions of the containment dam around the coal ash pond. We will continue to be here on-site throughout the cleanup efforts and subsequent investigation of this incident. We must determine how and why this happened so we can make sure it never happens again in North Carolina.”

Governor McCrory and Secretary Skvarla are discussing possible changes to rules and laws to speed up response to incidents like this in the future.

The state filed lawsuits for injunctive relief in 2013 against Duke Energy Progress Inc. and Duke Energy Carolinas, LLC for claims related to the discharge of wastewater from 14 of the utility’s North Carolina coal ash impoundments. The lawsuits seek a court order to require the utility to address groundwater and wastewater violations at multiple sites the utility uses to store coal ash residuals. The lawsuits have not been resolved, but the state in July proposed a consent order with the utility regarding the utility’s coal ash impoundments in Asheville and Gaston County.

“My administration is the first in North Carolina history to take legal action against the utility regarding coal ash ponds,” McCrory said. “We have been moving on this issue since the beginning of my term and will continue to do so.”