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State regulators to request plans, video of pipes at coal ash facilities and announce inspections

RALEIGH – State regulators plan to conduct detailed inspections of all Duke Energy’s coal ash facilities in North Carolina next week and will request that Duke Energy provide engineering and emergency action plans and maps for the facilities and videos of the insides of all pipes at the impoundments.

“As we work to address coal ash impoundments statewide, we will be taking a comprehensive look at all the infrastructure at these sites to ensure that spills like the one that occurred in Eden never happen again,” said John Skvarla, secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Staff in the state Division of Water Resources this week informed Duke Energy officials of the agency’s intentions to inspect all permitted and unpermitted discharge points at the company’s coal ash impoundments. Officials in the Division of Water Resources plan to map and photograph discharge points at the facilities with coal ash ponds, note the types of discharges and structural integrity of the pipes and other discharge outfalls, and collect and start analyzing water samples from all pipes. Tom Reeder, director of the Division of Water Resources, said his staff will use the data they collect next week to generate detailed geographic information system maps of the infrastructure at all 14 facilities with ash ponds.

“If we’re going to address these facilities in a deliberate and thoughtful manner, we first need comprehensive data about everything we can learn about these facilities,” said Reeder. “All of this information will inform our future decision-making with regard to these coal ash impoundments.”

Also, staff in the Division of Energy, Mineral and Land Resources, or DEMLR, which regulates the dams around the coal ash impoundments, plan to send a letter Wednesday to Duke Energy requesting engineering and emergency action plans for all the company’s facilities with coal ash impoundments. The agency will request that Duke Energy use cameras to video the insides of all pipes at the facilities and provide the videos to the state.

Between Feb. 20 and March 1, staff in DEMLR conducted visual inspections of the spillways beneath the dams at coal ash impoundments. DENR staff worked through last Saturday to finish inspecting the pipes after learning from Duke Energy officials Friday afternoon that the company had identified additional corrugated metal pipes as part of the permitted, engineered outfalls at other Duke Energy sites. Previously, the company had reported that it thought the 48-inch corrugated metal pipe that ruptured and caused the coal ash spill at the Dan River plant was the only such metal stormwater pipe at any Duke Energy facility in North Carolina. Eight of the state’s 33 coal ash ponds have corrugated metal pipe, although no pipes other than two stormwater pipes at the Dan River facility run beneath coal ash ponds, Duke Energy officials reported.

“During our visual inspections, we did not see any discoloration or cloudy water that you would typically see if wastewater was leaking into the spillway pipes,” said Tracy Davis, director of DEMLR. “However, running cameras through every pipe and getting the plans for each site will give us a much

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better understanding of the construction of those spillway pipes as well as the integrity of the dams and whether there are any problems with these sites.”

Steve McEvoy, the state Dam Safety engineer, plans to request that the utility provide DENR with a schedule within 10 days for how the company would video the pipes and a timeline for reporting the results. McEvoy will direct Duke Energy to video the inside of the pipes constructed from corrugated metal first, especially a leaking pipe identified during the state’s visual inspections last weekend at the Cliffside Steam Station in Rutherford County.

The plans DEMLR is requesting of Duke Energy will help the state better understand how each facility functions. McEvoy requested that Duke Energy provide the emergency action and engineering plans, even though state law does not require utilities to provide the state with such plans or other materials.

A copy of the letter DEMLR plans to send today to the utility will be available on the Dam Safety section of DENR’s “Dan River Spill” webpage, <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/guest/dan-river-spill>.

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