

ASH POND NEWSLETTER



December 2020

The following is a collection of ash pond news from the month of December 2020. The intent of the newsletter is to summarize news regarding ash pond closure activities, lawsuits filed against utilities relating to their ash ponds, as well as regulatory changes impacting ash pond operations or closures. This newsletter is distributed on a monthly basis.

SPECIAL COVERAGE

A special report published by the International Energy Agency (IEA) provides us with a coal analysis and forecast through 2025, while looking at some of the factors which affected decline and demand of coal ash in the past few years. Global coal consumption is estimated to have fallen by 7% since 2018. According to IEA, two trends affected coal-fired power generation in 2019: weak electricity demand growth, and low natural gas prices. Renewable energy generation also increased in 2019. With the COVID-19 pandemic following in 2020, global coal demand experienced the largest drop in demand since the Second World War. China also switched from small coal boilers for air quality reasons, another major factor in the 2020 decline of global coal demand. Despite this decline, IEA also indicates that 2021 will see a slight surge in coal demand.

Looking ahead to 2025, coal demand is expected to flatten due to three main factors: coal-fired power plant retirements in developed countries will continue to accelerate; low-carbon generation technologies such as wind and solar will gain momentum due to policy support; low gas prices will continue to disrupt the mindset that coal is the cheapest source of dispatchable electricity.

<https://www.iea.org/reports/coal-2020>

LEGAL AND REGULATORY



Big Cajun II Power Plant in Baton Rouge, LA

Central Louisiana Electric Company Corporate Holdings LLC (Cleco) is headquartered in Pineville, Louisiana, and owns three of the four remaining coal plants in Louisiana. It also manages the only four ash ponds in the state. Power companies were granted a six-month extension in August 2020 by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to comply with closure rules set in 2015 and are now required to close unlined coal ponds by April 11, 2021. In that order, the USEPA also gave companies the chance to request more time to close storage ponds if they planned to stop generating coal-fired power by a certain date. **Cleco** submitted extension requests for all three of its facilities.

<https://www.nola.com/news/business/>

A group of east Orange County, Florida residents filed a lawsuit against **Orlando Utilities Commission** two years ago, alleging that there was health-threatening contamination at residential properties caused by two coal-fired units at the Stanton Energy Center. The lawsuit identified an area of nearly 30,000 affected residents and 15,000 homes. However, the residents have made their motion to voluntarily dismiss their suit against **Orlando Utilities Commission**, for reasons not stated by the residents at this time.

<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/environment/>

The **Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)** plans to relocate approximately 175 graves from the Gallatin Fossil Plant property in Gallatin, Tennessee next year as part of a proposed coal ash landfill expansion at the Site. The graves existed prior to **TVA's** purchase of the property in the 1950s. In all, six family cemeteries would be affected by the project, which is connected to the settlement of a lawsuit last year between **TVA** and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) regarding coal ash storage at the power plant.

<https://www.gallatinnews.com/news/>



Gallatin Fossil Plant in Gallatin, TN

At the time that the April 2015 USEPA rule regulating coal combustion residuals (CCR) was issued, the rule could not be regulated under state programs. This month, the USEPA proposed to approve Texas as the third state to gain approval to operate a coal ash permit program.

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/>

CLOSURES AND MODIFICATIONS

Alabama Power has ambitious goals to close its coal ash ponds in the next 7-12 years, due to USEPA regulations requiring utilities to transition to dry handling and disposal of coal ash. Last year, customer rates for users of **Alabama Power** went up by about 3%, due in part to the \$2.8 billion cleanup estimate. Now, **Alabama Power's** comptroller is estimating this cleanup will take closer to \$3.3 billion. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) has issued permits and draft permits for some closure plans, while **Alabama Power** is moving forward with efforts for elements that are required regardless of closure plans, such as dewatering the ash ponds.

<https://www.al.com/news/2020/12/>

Dewatering coal ash ponds at **Georgia Power Company's** Hammond Power Plant in northwest Georgia is set to begin this month. This process is estimated to continue through the entire 15-year closure process. The complex technical process of dewatering has been designed and will be overseen by Evoqua Water Technologies. The plan was approved by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

<https://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/>

In Albany, Georgia, residents are insisting that toxic coal ash residue from Plant Mitchell, owned by **Georgia Power Company**, is being diverted to the Dougherty County landfill for disposal. However, one Dougherty County official who is well-versed in the language of waste management—Assistant Dougherty Administrator, Scott Addison—told *The Albany Herald* that the rumors have no basis in truth.

<https://www.albanyherald.com/news/>

Vistra announced that it would shut down its Coletto Creek Power Plant in Texas by 2027. The plant generates millions of dollars in tax revenue annually for Goliad County. However, **Vistra** officials have stated that it would be prohibitively expensive for the plant to comply with rules enacted by the USEPA regarding the disposal of coal ash and the limits of toxic metals in wastewater discharge.



Coletto Creek Power Plant in Goliad County, TX

<https://www.victoriaadvocate.com/counties/goliad/>

After more than a century of coal use, on December 1, 2020 **Xcel Energy** stopped burning coal at its Bay Front Power plant in Ashland, Wisconsin. Mark Stoering, president of **Xcel's** Wisconsin subsidiary, said the move continues the utility's commitment to reducing carbon emissions. **Xcel** was the first major U.S. utility to target carbon-free electricity by 2050.

<https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/environment/>

In Colorado, the Air Quality Control Commission unanimously reversed a preliminary decision made in November to require the Craig Station, in Moffatt county, to close early. The original decision was meant to address regional haze that impacts national parks and wilderness areas. **Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association**

operates the Craig Station and has planned to close the plant by the end of 2029, instead of the early date of 2028. The other two plants which were initially going to close at an earlier date were the Platte River Power Authority's Rawhide plant and Colorado Springs' Ray Nixon plant. They now have planned 2030 closure dates.

<https://www.gjsentinel.com/news>

Along the Arizona-Utah state line, the Navajo Generating station was a 2,250-megawatt plant that closed last year. The plant was operated by the **Salt River Project** and owned by several entities including the US Bureau of Reclamation. This month, three towering concrete stacks left at the plant were demolished. The work is part of a \$150 million decommissioning of the plant that is on land leased by the Navajo Nation.

<https://apnews.com/article/>

In 2020, 9.4 gigawatts of coal capacity were shut down nationwide?—the fourth highest annual total since 2009. However, the 36 retired coal plants were relatively low emitters of carbon dioxide. Of the 385 million tons of carbon dioxide generated between 2010 and 2019 by units retiring, this year is the smallest such figure since 2017, according to an *E&E News* review of federal data.

<https://www.eenews.net/stories/>

In Chesterfield, Virginia, **Dominion Energy** is undergoing a state-mandated coal ash excavation project, which has the popular Dutch Gap boat launch on the James River blocked. Preserving public access to the river is a priority for the county's Parks and Recreation Department, and consideration is being given to a secondary site for boat launching farther east in Enon. Thousands of locals and tourists use this boat ramp each year and it is a non-trivial source of revenue.

<https://www.chesterfieldobserver.com/articles/>

CONTAMINATION



TVA Paradise Fossil Plant, KY

In 2009, hundreds of contractors were hired by **TVA** to help clean up the massive coal ash spill in the Emory River. Crews worked in continuous shifts, with contractors sometimes trudging through freezing cold water to unclog pumps on the dredging machines. In December 2009, right before the final section of the Emory river was to be cleaned up, work suddenly halted. This was due to official reports from **TVA** indicating that mercury levels were three times higher in the river than they had been in the coal ash holding pond. Additionally, nuclear waste was discovered, exposure to which increases the risk for cancer. Moving forward under the guidance of state and federal regulators, a 30-year timeline for monitored natural recovery of the Emory River is now underway, allowing ash to mix naturally with the sediment and preexisting contaminants in the riverbed. Hundreds of workers exposed to this contaminated water were injured or face illnesses, and dozens have died.

<https://grist.org/justice/>

Indiana has more coal ash than any other state, with 13 unlined ponds sitting directly within floodplains. The Hoosier Environmental Council released a report that 14 of Indiana's 15 coal ash sites have left groundwater unfit for human consumption; Indiana is taking few steps to stop these pollutants from spreading. The Hoosier Environmental Council report details how Indiana is far behind other states in coal ash cleanup.

<https://www.indianaenvironmentalreporter.org/posts>

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