

ASH POND NEWSLETTER



March 2021

The following is a collection of ash pond news from the month of March 2021. 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.

ASH POND CLOSURES AND MODIFICATIONS

The last coal-fired power plant in New England consists of two units at Merrimack Station in Bow, New Hampshire. The 448-megawatt plant is owned by **Granite Shore Power**, an investment group that bought it from Eversource in 2017. It operates mostly as a “Peaker Plant” providing power to meet occasional demand. However, following the near-collapse of the Texas power grid, Merrimack Station has won another year’s funding from the



Merrimack Station in Bow, New Hampshire.

Forward Capacity Market, run by ISO-New England, designed to guarantee future electricity supplies. The money will come out of electricity bills whether or not the units are called on to produce electricity, and the plant will get paid for any power that it generates. New England’s other coal plant, Bridgeport Harbor, in Connecticut, is scheduled to close July 2021.

<https://www.concordmonitor.com/>

In order to meet the United Nations (UN) Paris Climate Agreement, countries in the UN must close their coal plants by 2030 to meet the goals. European Union (EU) coal power generation peaked in 2012, and has had a rapid decline, with half of Europe’s coal plants closing or announcing pre-2030 closure plans in the five years since the UN Paris Climate Agreement. The main factor in this decline has been the fall in the cost of solar and wind power. Health impacts caused by air pollution have also played a strong role in adapting EU policies. There are still 162 coal plants that remain online or under construction in Europe, with 70% focused in Germany, Poland, and Turkey.

<https://beyond-coal.eu/2021/03/23/europes-coal-phaseout-were-halfway-there/>



Montour Power Plant in Washingtonville, PA.

Talen Energy, based in Allentown, Pennsylvania and Texas, has pledged to stop burning coal at the Montour Power Plant in Washingtonville, Pennsylvania by the end of 2025. Natural gas will replace the 1500 MW, two-unit power generation. The Plant is located on the 640-acre Montour Preserve, which features man-made Lake Chillisquaque. The lake was built in 1972 for the power plant's cooling towers. Now, the preserve will be donated to a nonprofit or local environment group along with \$1 million for maintenance. **Talen Energy** has promised to give \$200,000 for clean water programs and additional water sampling, in addition to their own groundwater sampling program which will continue for 30 years after closure.

<https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/>

Coal-fired plant Lewis & Clark Station in Sidney, Montana is prepared to close at the end of March 2021. The owner, **Montana-Dakota Utilities (MDU)**, is also planning to retire two coal plants in Mandan, North Dakota, in March 2022. **MDU's** portfolio consists of approximately 50% coal plants, but after the closures, coal will only account for 34% of the portfolio. The company anticipates that its renewable energy will remain at 21% of its portfolio.

<https://montanafreepress.org/2021/03/29/>

LEGAL AND REGULATORY

In 1935, President Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration as part of the New Deal program. He foresaw community-run cooperatives with federal funding as a practical way to bring electricity to more rural areas. Now across 56% of the United States, electric cooperatives serve 42 million people. But in recent years, as part of a national energy democracy movement, customers of electric cooperatives are demanding greater transparency and expanded access to renewable energy from their cooperatives, whose elected boards are sometimes "anti-consumer." Many Tennessee co-op members are poor, with power bills that exceed 10% of their income. A way to reduce this burden on consumers is through energy efficiency and transparency about the board's motives. <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/>

Georgia's largest electric public utility, **Georgia Power**, may need to monitor groundwater near coal ash ponds for five decades under a revived proposal that cleared a Georgia House committee. Some environmental groups believe this is not enough, stating that migration off-site will occur, therefore monitoring is not sufficient. There is an additional proposal which would require coal ash to be stored in lined landfills, but this has not moved during this legislative session.

<https://patch.com/georgia/across-ga/>

Senate Bill 271, originally written to remove the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's (IDEM) responsibility to assess industrial waste control facility property tax exemptions and to change where the state posted its impaired waters list, could now establish the state's first coal ash permitting program. It will be less stringent than the federal regulations currently in effect in Indiana. The bill passed the House Environmental Affairs Committee and will head to the full Indiana House of Representatives for consideration. <https://www.indianaenvironmentalreporter.org/posts/>.

CONTAMINATION

Since 2009, 12 of the 23 remaining coal plants in Illinois have been closed. Five more, owned by **Vistra Energy**, are set to close in this decade. These plant closures often leave behind property with massive buildings and smokestacks. Only three plants have seen demolition activity: the Pearl Generating Station north of St. Louis, the Crawford Generating Station in

Chicago, and, most recently, the Wood River Power Station in East Alton. Environmental groups were worried about Wood River Power Station's demolition because the owner, **Commercial Liability Partners**, avoided speaking with local residents and elected leaders. Another recent incident in Illinois faced a similar scrutiny—the April 2020 demolition of the old Crawford Generating Smokestack in Chicago. The city fined **Hilco** for the problems, but local environmental groups never heard from **Hilco**, the City, or the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA). These demolitions can be problematic because the dust from demolition contains toxic heavy metals, like arsenic and lead, and the IEPA does not have specific regulations for coal-fired power plant demolitions. <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/>

On the banks of the Mississippi River, utility **Ameren's** coal-fired Sioux Energy Center near West Alton, Missouri is in violation of the Clean Water Act for discharging toxic coal ash pollutants. Ameren has four coal-fired power plants in the St. Louis Area, all alongside the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. There are 14 coal ash ponds, some lined and some unlined, associated with these power plants. According to the company's senior manager of environmental services, extensive sampling of these rivers has showed that there is no difference in water contaminants upstream and downstream of **Ameren's** generating facilities. <https://www.stltoday.com/business/local/>

RENEWABLES

Dynegy was an electric company based in Houston, Texas, until merging with **Vistra Energy** in April 2019. They are a member of the American Coal Ash Association (ACAA), which launched a leading group called Citizens for Recycling First. The group claims that using harmful coal ash as an amendment to other products is not detrimental. Recently, **Dynegy** announced a three-year partnership with Chicago's Metropolitan Pier Exposition Authority. The agreement will attempt to provide 100% renewable energy to McCormick Place. <https://lions101.com/energy>

"Combustible by-product (CBP) production in the U.S. electric power industry decreased from 135.1 million short tons in 2010 to 88.7 million short tons in 2019, a 34% decline. CBPs are residues left over after the combustion of coal, petroleum coke, residual fuel oil, and wood or wood waste. CBPs can be disposed of in onsite or offsite landfills or ponds, reused in products such as concrete wallboard or as structural fill to support roadways (referred to as beneficial reuse), or stored for subsequent disposal or reuse. The beneficial reuse rate of CBPs from operating power plants increased from 38% in 2010 to 44% in 2019.

One cause for the decline in CBP production is reduced coal-fired capacity as coal-fired power plants are retired. Recycling a larger portion of CBPs has helped ensure that enough CBPs are available for beneficial reuse despite lower CBP production overall. Higher CBP recycling rates have also reduced CBP disposal at onsite ponds, landfills, or offsite disposal locations." <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/>

ON A LIGHTER NOTE

When Google News searches for coal-related key terms, it doesn't always get it right...

<https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/rspca-lockdown-kittens-find-forever-homes-7851870>

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