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WASHINGTON – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is releasing action plans developed by 15 electric utility facilities with coal ash impoundments, describing the measures the facilities are taking to make their impoundments safer. The action plans are a response to EPA's final assessment reports on the structural integrity of these impoundments that the agency made public last May. Coal ash was brought prominently to national attention in 2008 when an impoundment holding disposed ash waste generated by the Tennessee Valley Authority broke open, creating a massive spill in Kingston, Tennessee, that covered millions of cubic yards of land and river and is regarded as one of the worst environmental disasters of its kind in history. Shortly afterwards, EPA began overseeing the cleanup, as well as investigating the structural integrity of impoundments where ash waste is stored.

"EPA is committed to making communities across the country safer places to live," said Mathy Stanislaus, assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response. "The information we are releasing today shows that we continue to make progress in our efforts to prevent future coal ash spills."

Since May 2009, EPA has been conducting on-site assessments of coal ash impoundments and ponds at electric utilities. EPA provides copies of the structural integrity assessment reports to each facility, and requests the facilities implement the reports' recommendations and provide their plans for taking action. The action plans released today address recommendations from assessments of 37 impoundments at 15 facilities. Many of these facilities have already begun implementing EPA's recommendations.

In addition to the action plans, EPA is also releasing assessment reports on the structural integrity of an additional 69 coal ash impoundments at 20 facilities across the country. Of these units, 35 were given a "poor" rating and none of the units received an "unsatisfactory" rating, which is the lowest possible EPA rating. The poor ratings were given because these units lacked some of the necessary engineering documentation required in the assessments, and not because the units are unsafe. Based on analysis from the engineers who conducted the assessments, the ratings for these units are likely to improve once the proper documentation is submitted.

The assessment reports have been completed by firms, under contract to EPA, who are experts in the field of dam integrity, and reflect the best professional judgment

of those engineering firms. A draft of these reports has been reviewed by the facilities and the states for factual accuracy. The comments on the draft reports are also posted on EPA's website. EPA is continuing to review the reports and technical recommendations, and is working with the facilities to ensure that the recommendations are implemented in a timely manner. Should facilities fail to take sufficient measures, EPA will take additional action, if the circumstances warrant. EPA will continue to provide additional information to the public on the impoundments and facilities as it becomes available.

Last year, EPA completed comprehensive assessments for 60 impoundments that were considered to have a high risk of causing harm if the impoundment were to fail. The agency is now in the process of evaluating the remaining impoundments and will continue to make its assessments and the facility action plans available to the public.

EPA is also in the process of developing the first-ever national rules to ensure the safe disposal and management of coal ash from coal-fired power plants. The proposed regulations will ensure stronger oversight of the structural integrity of impoundments, and protection of human health and the environment. The agency is evaluating more than 400,000 public comments on the proposed rule, which was released in May 2010.

For more information and to view all the electric utility action plans and EPA coal ash assessment reports: http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/nonhaz/industrial/special/fossil/surveys2/index.htm [1]

SOURCE [2]

SOURCE [3]

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