Concerns Raised Over Coal Ash in Missouri

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Environmental advocates believe there are many spots around Missouri where coal ash has fouled ground and surface waters.

Last week, the owner of a suburban St. Louis business, Rotary Drilling Supply Inc., reached a settlement with the Environmental Protection Agency over the unauthorized disposal of coal ash, which is the waste produced when coal is burned to produce electricity.

Under the settlement, Rotary Drilling must place a cap over the ash piles to prevent runoff and take other measures to ensure against further pollution. The company must also restore impacted wetlands. The ash came from Ameren's Rush Island plant in Jefferson County.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch [1] reported that the Sierra Club and other groups say lax regulations in Missouri give utilities wide latitude to reuse coal waste.

"It's a loophole that needs to be fixed," said John Hickey, director of the Missouri Chapter of the Sierra Club.

The Sierra Club recently urged the state to require groundwater monitoring around existing ash ponds at power plants.

St. Louis-based Ameren recycles tens of thousands of tons of ash from its Labadie plant each year to make concrete mix sold at St. Louis-area home improvement stores. Ameren and other companies also have been granted exemptions to use ash for other purposes, including trial use as mine fill at Mississippi Lime Co. near Ste. Genevieve.

In 1998 and again in 2001, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources granted Ameren an exemption from solid waste laws to use coal waste from its power plants as structural fill, for road base construction and soil stabilization.

The Post-Dispatch learned through records obtained in a Sunshine Law request that the DNR suspended Ameren's "beneficial use" exemption last summer in connection with an alleged violation in the Rotary Drilling case.

A DNR spokeswoman didn't respond to questions about the exemption. Ameren didn't answer when asked if the suspension was still in effect.

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Information from: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, http://www.stltoday.com [2]

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