

Groups calling for action on coal ash disposal sites

June 19 -- Three environmental groups have written to the Department of Homeland Security, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency asking them to disclose a list of 44 hazardous coal ash disposal sites.

Earthjustice, the Environmental Integrity Project and the Sierra Club filed a Freedom of Information Act request, seeking to force the federal government to disclose the sites.

"People have a right to know if mountains of toxic coal ash are threatening their communities so they can take action and put pressure on their local utilities to demand clean up," said Bruce Nilles, director of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign.

Coal ash sites may contain arsenic, lead, mercury and other contaminants that can leach out and into groundwater or drinking water sources.

Last week, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., revealed that the EPA had a list of 44 "high hazard" coal ash sites across the country that could pose a threat to the nearby public, but that officials with Homeland Security and the Army Corps of Engineers wanted the information kept secret because of security risks.

Boxer's committee is investigating coal ash impoundments after more than 1 billion gallons of coal combustion waste covered more than 300 acres near the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston coal-fired power plant in December 2008. Boxer also wants the Obama administration to clear the way for identifying the hazardous sites to the public.

"The nature and location of these dump sites are precisely what EPA and the public need to know," said Lisa Evans of Earthjustice. "The free flow of information will help stop the flow of toxic ash into our communities."

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