

Tennessee fly ash spill larger than originally thought

Dec. 31 -- A fly ash spill at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Plant in Roane County, Tenn., is three times larger than initially thought, releasing more than a billion gallons of fly ash sludge into the community.

A wall failed at an 80-acre retention pond, Dec. 22, releasing some 5.4 million cubic yards of fly ash sludge that destroyed 3 homes and damaged several others. Preliminary environmental data shows there are no acute health effects from contact with the coal fly ash material, though the TVA recommends avoiding direct contact.

Samples taken at the Kingston water plant have not violated safe drinking water standards. Samples taken closer to the spill did exceed drinking water standards. One sample showed arsenic levels above maximum contaminant level. But that should not be an issue unless people regularly drink untreated river water, the TVA said. Treatment at the Kingston plant most likely would remove all contaminants. Private wells or springs may be contaminated and should not be used for drinking, cooking or bathing until further evaluation, according to the TVA.

The pond, one of three at the site, is formally inspected annually and checked out on a quarterly and daily basis, the TVA said.

The utility estimates it will take several weeks to clean up the mess. It is providing hotel rooms, food, transportation and other assistance to the families impacted.

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