

US lawmaker: Coal ash regs needed to protect water

Thursday, January 08, 2009

WASHINGTON — US Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, is calling for regulations on coal ash in the wake of the December 22 massive ash slide in Kingston, TN, that occurred when a retention pond burst, spilling 1 billion gallons of sludge from a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) coal plant into nearby surface water and the environment, according to a January 8 Bloomberg [report](#).

Boxer, chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said that under new standards, the cost of managing the ash would be less costly than pending cleanup costs.

She also said she will seek regulations to mandate the storage of coal ash as dry, rather than storing it wet in ponds, as was the case at the Kingston plant.

According to a January 7 [article](#) in *The New York Times*, most coal ash is stored wet in ponds, but scientists say the key to its safe disposal is to store it dry in landfills with caps; that way, its chemical constituents won't leach into the environment. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not yet issued national regulations governing the disposal of coal ash as a nonhazardous waste.

The New York Times reported that a 2007 EPA report identified 63 sites in 26 states where drinking water sources and surface water were contaminated by heavy metals leaching from coal ash waste.

The ash slide, which now is in the recovery and cleanup stage, reignited the debate over whether coal ash waste should be regulated as a hazardous material. According to data analysis released January 7 by the nonprofit [Environmental Integrity Project \(EIP\)](#), many of the nearly 100 largely unregulated "wet dumps" across the United States that are comparable to the TVA's breached site in Kingston appear to pose a greater potential danger than the recently ruptured Tennessee site. The coal ash waste potentially contains toxic metals including arsenic and lead.

Boxer is quoted by Bloomberg as saying at a January 8 hearing, "It is critically important that protective standards for coal-ash waste be created."