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## Should state regulate coal ash ponds more closely?

**EPA data suggest those who live nearby have higher cancer rate.**

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**A TVA coal ash spill last year flooded hundreds of acres with toxic sludge. NEW YORK TIMES PHOTO**

When a Tennessee Valley Authority holding pond ruptured last year and a flood of toxic sludge fouled hundreds of acres of land and waterways near Harriman, Tenn., most North Carolinians may have wondered if they'd ever face anything like it.

We should hope not. Although there are 14 coal ash ponds near major power plants throughout the state, utilities here have not had the kind of problem TVA had in December with coal ash, the residue left from coal-fired plants. **It can contain arsenic, selenium, lead, cadmium and other toxic substances.**

But **data from Environmental Protection Agency** records on 210 coal ash sites in this country suggest that the public – and especially public officials – ought to be paying closer attention to safety. Why? Because an analysis by advocacy groups Environmental Integrity Project and Earthjustice say that **those who live near coal ash landfills and wet ponds have a higher risk of cancer as well as other maladies. The data suggest that toxic substances found in drinking water near those sites may be related to higher rates of cancer.**

Yet so far the N.C. General Assembly has not shown much interest in the topic of coal ash. That may be because legislators are preoccupied with a big shortfall in state revenues. That's understandable. And the data have yet to be widely circulated in a way that provides adequate context for lawmakers with many other concerns on their plate.

But legislation sponsored by Rep. Pricey Harrison, D-Guilford, surely deserves exploration while the legislature is in session. Her bill would expand requirements, such as liners, for landfills and ponds, **authorize the state to collect fees for landfills** and storage ponds, require monitoring of

ponds, phase out the storage of some materials and remove the exemption of coal ash ponds from dam safety laws.

This would be a good time for state officials, public health advocates, environmentalists and business interests to explore the data, to understand how coal ash is regulated in this state, and determine whether that's sufficient to protect public health in North Carolina.

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