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## Storm Flows in Delaware River Spread Pollution From PPL Ash Pit

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It has been seven weeks since environmental catastrophe struck the Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic River north of Easton/Phillipsburg when PPL's Martins Creek power plant sent polluted sludge into the river as a result of a coal fly ash basin failure (see below for brief recap).

The last seven weeks is one of the driest on record as parched lawns and fallen brown leaves prove. One advantage of this lack of rainfall was the opportunity for PPL to remove the coal fly ash sludge from the bottom of the river and the riverbanks before storms carried it further. PPL reported that their investigations showed the slurry had settled out mostly above Easton/Phillipsburg and was concentrated at their outfall and in two "pools" near Easton/Phillipsburg totaling 40 acres in size. The good news, according to PPL, was the sludge had become semi-solid, which would make cleanup easier. (Note: The sludge has been found throughout the river -- not only in these discreet "pools" -- from Easton to Bulls Island, about 40 miles downstream. Delaware Riverkeeper Network has made Reports to the Natural Resource Damage Assessment team of these findings).

Lower Mount Bethel and Harmony Township communities along the river listened to PPL's optimistic proposal that the polluted sludge could be removed from the river, the "pools" sucked out by vacuums. While the outfall area and a small area at the Easton Water intake got attention, the sludge in the river and on the riverbanks sat. The public and Delaware Riverkeeper Network called for a ramp-up of clean up activities, the doubling up of efforts while the weather cooperated. Delaware Riverkeeper Network filed a petition with the US EPA to takeover the site due the slow pace, problem-plagued clean up efforts and mistakes made by PADEP such as the use of an old basin that resulted in additional groundwater pollution. Towns, organizations, NJDEP, and Congressman Scott Garret filed letters in support of the Petition (presently under review by USEPA). Still, the largest areas buried with the coal slurry were tested and examined by the company and agencies, but remained in the river, slowly migrating further into the environment, smothering the life on the bottom of the river, and exposing fish (including migrating juvenile shad) and wildlife and drinking water supplies to the coal fly ash sludge and its toxic components.

Now the storm flows of the past weekend and this week have dashed all optimism and PPL's opportunity to remove the compacted sludge before the weather changed has passed. The clean up efforts at the outfall have halted due to high flows, part of the temporary dam and associated booms that had been constructed around

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the heaviest sludge deposits at the outfall washed away, the river turned the now-dreaded but familiar gray-brown color on Sunday as the sludge was stirred up again and the dried coal fly ash residue on the riverbanks was carried back into the river's flow. Arsenic levels in the river were once again elevated since the sludge was re-suspended into the water column.

After the basin blowout, extremely high levels of arsenic and elevated levels of other pollutants were found in the river. For instance, PADEP water tests showed arsenic spiked on August 26 from less than 4 ppb upstream to 592 ppb at the outfall (safe drinking water standard is 10 ppb effective January 2006 nationally, 5 ppb effective January 2006 in NJ and presently 50 ppb). Other significant spikes were: mercury (1.32 ug/l), barium (503 ug/l), selenium (37.7 ug/l), lead (22.2 ug/l), and other heavy metals. Delaware Riverkeeper Network (DRN) has contacted various sources in an attempt to get the water quality sampling reports conducted by PPL (at 20 sites, according to the company) and others for water suppliers on the Delaware River. What DRN learned is disturbing.

Arsenic is toxic and a human carcinogen, which is why it is removed from drinking water. Since the levels of arsenic in the river are normally extremely small, it is not customarily tested for by surface water suppliers here and has not historically been a problem. When the blowout occurred, all water suppliers on the river downstream of the plant were required to test for this pollutant and PPL initiated testing in the river that continues to today. However, the precautions taken by the activation of the Delaware River Emergency Response Program and the states in the aftermath of the basin failure did not result in action that protected those who drink river water in Trenton. That is because PPL has not processed the 150 samples that are still sitting from August at the Trenton Water Works. No one knows what the levels of arsenic have been at Trenton over the past seven weeks following the basin failure. No one knows if the storm flows of the past several days have caused a new spike in this potentially deadly toxin at the Trenton intake. And no one may ever know because many of those samples are now beyond the expiration date for reliable lab analysis.

As far as other water suppliers, Morrisville PA reports a new spike on October 9 of arsenic at 17 ppb, as reported to them by PPL's consultant. This is above the safe drinking water standard that will take effect in January, although it does not require corrective action by the water department now. As a matter of fact, the water department does not test for the level of arsenic in the water delivered to customers; it relies on analysis of the river water at this time. The City of Philadelphia reported last month that they processed their samples but no one has asked for the data; according to the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), no one entity has done an analysis of the data from all sources since the pollution event began. The DRBC conducted tests on August 26 and shared their results; PADEP and PPL have posted some results on line. DRN has called for the USEPA and NRDA to analyze the water samples and inform the public of the results right away so residents can decide for themselves about exposing themselves to the health risks of arsenic and other pollutants in their water. The information is also important for those who eat fish from the river and for contact recreation, which there was much of in the hot days of this past August and September.

Concerns about other toxins in the river water remain since the coal fly ash sludge contains heavy metals and other dangerous pollutants; only arsenic is being tested for by PPL at the water supply intakes. As the rains keep falling, the river keeps carrying the toxic coal ash sludge further, exposing more communities, more fish and wildlife, more of the river's aquatic ecosystem to pollution.

"The recent storms and flooding have delivered toxic sludge further downstream and onto roads and yards. This is a continuing health and environmental nightmare for the Delaware River and the river communities and there is no excuse for it", said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper.

"If anyone still thought that PADEP and PPL were acting fast enough and making decisions that were protective of the river environment, that misconception is gone now", said Tracy Carluccio, Special Projects Director for Delaware Riverkeeper Network. "This spread of pollution was preventable if only PADEP and PPL acted expeditiously to clean up the coal fly ash deposits", said Carluccio.

PADEP and PPL have failed to act in time. The cleanup effort needs a comprehensive approach from a federal agency that has experience with hazardous cleanups and can operate at arm's length from PPL. Letters are being requested in support of DRN's petition to USEPA for a preliminary assessment under the Superfund law. For more information on this go to [www.delawareriverkeeper.org](http://www.delawareriverkeeper.org)

Brief recap:

On August 23, 2005 a leak began in PPL's coal fly ash storage basin at their Martins Creek power plant in Northampton County, PA. By the next day, the leak turned into a flood over the roads and fields adjacent to the basin, then an eruption of coal fly ash slurry that lasted for several days, finally slowing down by August 27. In the end, at least 100 million gallons (company estimate) of coal fly ash effluent gushed into the Oughoughton Creek and the Delaware River. The basin, 16 years old, holds coal fly ash produced by PPL's two coal fired units and may be used for disposal of other industrial waste on the site. Normally the water-filled waste impoundment settles out fly ash sediment before the effluent is piped to the river, alongside the Oughoughton Creek, in the vicinity of Foul Rift. The company reported that a gate in the basin broke apart, causing the uncontrolled discharge of effluent and sludge.

Easton, about 10 miles downstream, had to shut down its water intakes for several days; the river was dark gray with a slick of light gray for more than a week. Known components of the fly ash include: arsenic, mercury, lead, silica, crystalline silica, barium, chromium, beryllium, thallium, antimony, selenium and possibly sulfur, cadmium, and other heavy metals. The toxin-laden slurry lines the river bottom for several miles downstream; as far south as Bulls Island the gray sludge is visible in between rocks in the river. Dried ash is stuck to the riverbanks for at least 8 miles downstream. The crystalline silica in the dried ash causes pulmonary disease and is classified as a probable human carcinogen.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network (DRN) advocated for a Natural Resources Damage Assessment team to be formed, which has been done. However, clean up efforts, overseen by PADEP, are slow and have been riddled with mishaps. For instance, PADEP approved the use of an old unlined basin at the power plant to store the clean up waste, despite protests from the public and DRN, who also called for the shut down of the coal-fired units while the basin was disabled. When PPL put the old basin to use, it sprung a leak on Sept. 9, polluting groundwater monitoring wells with selenium. Finally, PPL shut down the coal plant, which remains closed. However, the basin that blew out originally has been quickly patched up and is being used as of Sept. 16 for storage of the clean up material. DRN opposes the use of this or any other basin at the plant and has filed a Petition under CERCLA with the EPA to begin a takeover of the Plant and clean up efforts. Residents are outraged at the mess and are contemplating legal action.

The EPA is considering DRN's request for a "preliminary assessment" and letters of support for the Petition have been submitted by Harmony Township, Warren County Environmental Committee, NJ DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell, PA Sierra Club, many other organizations and residents, and, most recently, Congressman Scott Garrett.