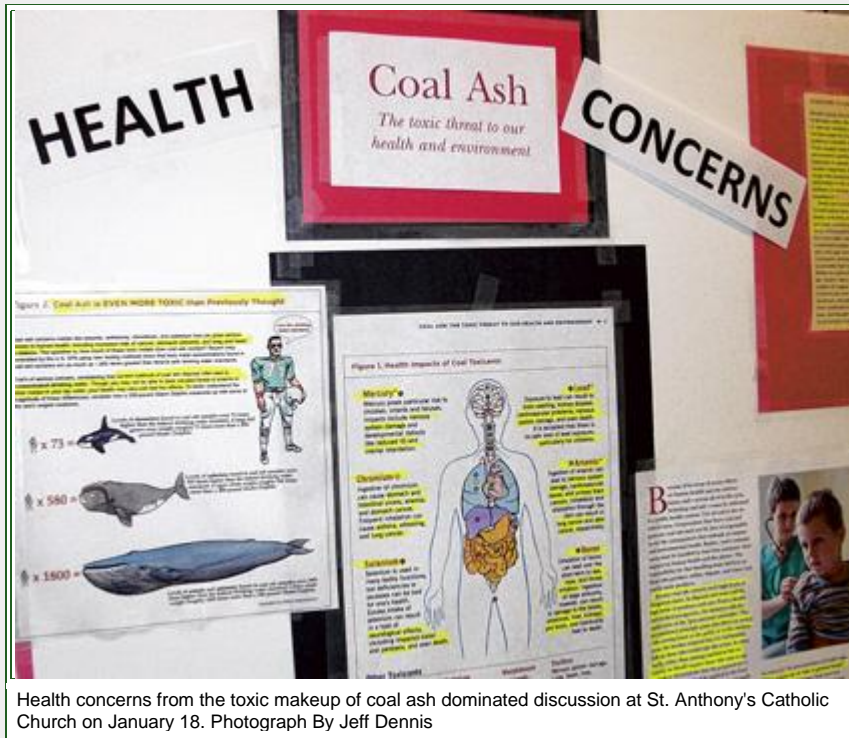


SCE&G Proposes Coal Ash Landfill in ACE Basin



By Jeff Dennis
Outdoor Correspondent, *Charleston Mercury*

Published:
Tuesday, January 25, 2011 4:49 PM EST

As we all know, the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto rivers are the main arteries that course through the ACE Basin, deriving their magnificence from the myriad veins of freshwater in Colleton County and beyond. With a proposed Coal Ash Landfill near Round O, SCE&G places a bull's eye on the heart of the ACE Basin, and a dagger in the heart of Lowcountry conservation efforts.

If sediments with high levels of toxins and heavy metals are allowed on the proposed landfill, the threat to the future of the ACE Basin will be omnipresent. SCE&G wants to place the coal ash in this area with reasonable assurance that it will remain controlled. However, what about acts of nature? Might a direct hit from a mighty hurricane deluge and wash out any such reasonable assurance? How about a catastrophic earthquake?

SCE&G runs a coal-burning power plant in Canadys on the Edisto River and they are required to capture and control what is known as the coal combustion residual. The coal ash is stored in two ways, in a wet or sludge pond or in a dry landfill. SCE&G uses sludge ponds in Canadys but they face space issues in the future, and have purchased 1730 acres on Pleasant Grove Road near Round O.

On January 5 SCE&G filed an application with the Colleton County Planning office, run by Phillip Slayter, for a special exemption from the county's zoning, which is required for a

solid waste landfill. This action places the matter in front of the Colleton County Board of Zoning Appeals, which will take up the issue on January 27 and has the authority to approve the special exemption request from SCE&G.

Concerned citizens quickly organized a public awareness meeting held on January 18 at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Walterboro. Why St. Anthony's? Father Jeffrey Kendall lives near the proposed SCE&G coal ash landfill and had a message to share, that God did not create the earth to be a waste but to be lived in, quoting the book of Isaiah. "I believe the people of this county deserve better," Kendall said.

Several hundred citizens attended the January 18 meeting seeking information about the health hazards from coal ash, and its insidious composition of arsenic, lead, cadmium, chromium, mercury and selenium. Despite the full-house conditions an amicable spirit filled the room, and after a few presentations and a question and answer period, most vowed to turn out for the January 27 Zoning Appeals meeting at 6 p.m. to express their concerns.

Nancy Cave represents the Coastal Conservation League and provided some interesting comments. "The Environmental Protection Agency has yet to rule on what to even classify coal ash, whether a toxic waste or a solid waste," Cave said. Coal ash has been under EPA review and a ruling on classification is likely due in 2011. "SC DHEC has indicated that coal ash should be treated as solid waste, and citizens should be aware that tax dollars could support the coal ash landfill if approved."

The application for the coal ash landfill anticipates 20 truckloads per day making the trip from the Canady plant to the landfill. Coal ash is not only a threat to seep into aquifers, but is also a known airborne threat. The application states that trucks will be washed down before returning to the plant, raising concerns about effects on plants, wildlife and citizens on surrounding roadways. Is it conceivable that once established, this sizable coal ash landfill might accept deliveries from other counties?

More to Come

This proposed SCE&G coal ash landfill has struck a chord with regular Colleton County residents, and this is a chance to raise awareness for the environment with all citizens. The proposed SCE&G coal ash landfill is a perfect example of how quickly a threat can materialize, with less than a month passing between the initial filing and the Zoning Appeals vote. At the public awareness meeting no map of the ACE Basin was on display, as potential human health concerns took the vanguard of the presentation; environmental health, human health and a healthy ecosystem should be tied together, but that seems a longer discussion with DHEC.

Colleton County comprises the lion's share of the ACE Basin, yet the Colleton County Planning Office revised the County's 2010 Land Use Plan to decrease zoning throughout the county and Colleton County Council approved it. Presently, depending how a Colleton County Zoning Appeals vote proceeds and the pending decision concerning classification of coal ash from the EPA, Colleton County may become home to a toxic waste dump.