

December 30, 2005

Divers Complete Vacuuming Major Area of Ash

Divers have completed vacuuming the first of two remaining areas of ash on the Delaware River bottom. The dive platforms now have been moved to the second area where ash had settled following October's heavy rain. Both areas are within about a mile downriver from the PPL boat launch.

About three acres remain to be vacuumed. A third dive platform will begin operating in early January.



Above, divers have moved to the second area of ash to continue the cleanup. Left, a third dive platform is being constructed.

From the Cleanup Director



Divers working on the cleanup took a much-needed break for the holidays and will resume work Jan. 3. The divers, many of whom come from other states, had worked seven days a week since late September without a day off. Before leaving for the holidays, they completed cleanup of one of two remaining areas of ash in the river.

During the holiday break, construction of a third dive platform continued.

An additional team of divers working from that platform is expected to join the cleanup effort in early January. Currently, the cleanup is scheduled to be completed March 1, but, barring bad weather, we hope to finish sooner than that.


At the Martins Creek plant, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has inspected the ash basin that

leaked and certified it as ready for restart. With the use of the basin approved, we restarted the plant's coal-fired generating units. Having the units available to generate will help to meet demand for electricity this winter, when customer use is high.

The DEP, along with the Lower Mount Bethel and Harmony Township engineers, observed the successful Dec. 15 test of the four discharge barriers that were modified or added to prevent a recurrence of the leak. The barriers consist of the steel-reinforced concrete panels and stoplogs that replace the wooden stoplogs, a reinforced steel wall, and two new shutoff valves.

The DEP has reviewed the changes and repairs made at the ash basin, and also has reviewed and approved our revised Emergency Response Plan. Following that thorough review, the DEP certified Ash Basin #4 ready for restart.


Bob Barkanic



Minerals, Metals Found Normally in Groundwater

Two rounds of tests of residential wells near the Martins Creek plant have found no water quality issues attributable to the fly ash release, which is not surprising, since groundwater usually flows toward the river and not the other way around. Because of this flow direction, any ash in the river typically would not affect well water at homes along the river.

Some area residents have continued to express concern that the ash spill may have caused a change in well water quality.

All sources of drinking water contain some naturally occurring minerals and metals. Because wells tap the groundwater, which soaks into the soil from rain or other precipitation and moves downward to fill cracks and other openings in beds of rock and sand, many things can affect the quality of drinking water from wells. As the water moves through the ground, it dissolves some of the minerals it comes in contact with.

Those naturally occurring minerals give groundwater in a particular area its chemical character or quality. At low levels, these substances generally are not harmful in drinking water.

Selenium, mercury and arsenic – metals present in fly ash – also occur naturally. Levels of minerals and metals that have been present historically in groundwater are called “background” levels. Seasonal fluctuations in the background levels are normal and depend on weather conditions. There’s also a background level of arsenic in the Delaware River. For example, a few samples collected upriver of the Martins Creek plant have had detectable levels of arsenic, with the highest level at 4.7 parts per billion.

Some other metals can be found in a home’s tap water because of corrosion in household plumbing. Lead, a metal also found in natural deposits, is one of those, as is copper. Both have commonly been used in household plumbing materials and

water service lines.

Older homes may be more likely to have lead pipes, joints and solder. However, new homes could be at risk as well. Metal pipes legally considered to be “lead-free” may contain up to 8 percent lead. These pipes can leach significant amounts of lead into the water for the first several months after their installation.

More information about well water is available from the federal Environmental Protection Agency. A booklet, “Drinking Water from Household Wells,” is available online at www.epa.gov/privatewells/pdfs/household_wells.pdf.

PPL will continue to test residential wells quarterly through August 2007. Pennsylvania residents who have participated in the well testing have received a letter offering the next test, which will be done Jan. 20–22. New Jersey residents will be offered an opportunity for another test in February.

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