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***New Interactive Web Tool Gives Details About
North Carolina's Toxic Coal Ash***

*Project highlights ongoing problems four years after Kingston, Tenn.,
disaster*

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Charlotte, N.C. – The Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Appalachian Voices, Southern Environmental Law Center, and North Carolina Conservation Network today launched the first-ever comprehensive online tool that allows North Carolinians to find specific information about coal ash impoundments near them. The site, www.SoutheastCoalAsh.org, includes information on the health threats associated with this toxic waste from coal-fired power plants, safety ratings of the coal ash impoundments, and how citizens can take action to call for strong federal safeguards.

North Carolina is one of nine states featured on the site, which is being launched four years after a massive coal ash dam in Kingston, Tenn., catastrophically failed. The disaster released a billion-gallon flood of coal ash slurry that poisoned some 300 acres, destroyed two dozen homes and filled the Emory River with sludge. The coalition developed the website to call greater attention to the lurking dangers of coal ash in the South, where almost 450 impoundments hold roughly 118 billion gallons of the toxic waste.

“North Carolina has 50 coal ash ponds, including some that are veritable man-made lakes full of toxic compounds that threaten our waterways and the public with potential dam failures,” said Sandra Diaz with Appalachian Voices. “SoutheastCoalAsh.org offers concerned citizens in North Carolina a new and easy way to learn if their community or drinking water source is in danger from these largely unregulated coal ash impoundments.”

The site features an interactive map and database of 100 coal-fired power plants in the Southeast, color-coded by the amount of damage each would inflict if the coal ash dams were to break, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. A brief glance at the map shows how much more work needs to be done to assess these dangers — almost half of the plants in the Southeast have inadequate data for EPA to properly assess the coal ash dams at those sites. Moreover, many of the plants lack adequate water monitoring data to show whether or not there are contamination problems.

Notably, of those dams that are rated in the Southeast, nearly one-third are “high hazard,” meaning that a dam failure like Kingston would likely cause fatalities. North Carolina has

more high hazard coal ash impoundments than any state in the Southeast, with over half the state's coal plants having at least one high hazard dam. North Carolina's own dam safety inspection ratings show more high hazard dams -- all but four of the state's 14 coal fired power plants are considered high hazard by the state, according to North Carolina's Dam Safety Engineering Division.

"It's been over four years since the EPA committed to properly regulate coal ash, but it remains an unregulated toxic waste stored in unlined lagoons, endangering community treasures like Mountain Island Lake," said Sarah Behnke with We Love Mountain Island Lake, a Charlotte-area group concerned about coal ash contamination at the lake. "SoutheastCoalAsh.org provides our community with the information and tools to communicate with EPA to ask for greater urgency in providing minimum federal guidelines for the disposal of toxic coal ash."

"On the Catawba River, there are a dozen coal ash impoundments owned by Duke Energy, all of which are contaminating the groundwater and the river," said Catawba Riverkeeper Rick Gaskins. "The Riverbend plant's ash ponds discharge into a reservoir that is the primary source of drinking water for approximately 860,000 people. This website will help people to learn about the threats to their water posed by these ash ponds and hopefully motivate them to take action."

Visitors to SoutheastCoalAsh.org can view the information in a variety of ways — an interactive map, aerial photos showing visually the location of coal ash ponds to water resources, fact sheets, tables — and can search for information by zip code, name of power plant, map, quantity of coal ash, name of waterway.

The site features more than a dozen informational pages detailing the health and environmental hazards of coal ash as well as the current legislative and regulatory environment, active legal battles, links to additional articles, news and more. Every coal-fired power plant in the Southeast has a site-specific page, accessible from the interactive map. One click takes the visitor deeper into the data about each plant to find out if there are any known contamination problems at the coal ash impoundment(s) on site, local action groups to contact about that plant, as well as other local, state, regional and federal actions citizens can take.

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