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Legislature Fails to Act to Protect Communities from Coal Ash Contamination

Atlanta, GA-- Despite a report released at the end of 2018 that found that eleven of the state's 12 coal-fired power plants are leaking pollution into Georgia's underground water supplies, the 2019 Georgia Legislative Session ended on Tuesday without passing any legislation to address the coal ash challenges that Georgia faces.

"Coal ash legislation introduced in the 2019 Georgia legislative session just scratched the surface of the ultimate safe storage we must have to protect Georgians," explained Jennette Gayer director of Environment Georgia and chair of the Georgia Water Coalition's Coal Ash Subcommittee. "Sadly, even these baby steps failed to pass."

Other Southern states and utilities have taken significant strides. State agencies in North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia are requiring [Duke Energy](#), [Dominion Energy](#) and the [Tennessee Valley Authority](#) to abandon plans to leave the ash in place in unlined ponds. At selected sites, the utilities must fully excavate coal ash and move it into fully lined landfills.

Georgia legislators introduced four measures to address coal ash in unlined pits near coal-fired power plants and six landfills around the state. None of this legislation advanced:

- [SB 123](#) increases surcharge for coal ash stored in landfills to equal surcharge for household garbage.
- [HR 257](#) is a resolution urging GA Power to remove the unlined coal ash pile at the McDonough-Atkinson Power Plant and place the coal ash in a lined landfill;
- [HB 93](#) will require Georgia Power and other power generating utilities to notify local communities before the water from coal ash ponds is drained into our local

rivers, lakes, and streams.

- [HB 94](#): Requires notification and more stringent testing at landfills that are accepting coal ash. It would also prohibit municipal solid waste landfills from storing coal ash in cells located in floodplains or too close to shallow groundwater aquifers.

“The toxins that we know are leaking out of these ponds are dangerous and could seriously impact human health,” said Jen Hilburn the Altamaha Riverkeeper. “We need all coal ash in Georgia to be stored in dry, lined, capped and monitored facilities away from our waterways.”

The 250 plus members of the Georgia Water Coalition will work in the coming months to educate local decision makers about the importance to act on coal ash and will be back during the 2020 legislative session where they hope to move coal ash legislation forward.