

News



Gas plant could be sending coal ash contaminated water into the White River

By REBECCA THIELE

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The Eagle Valley natural gas plant in Martinsville on a rainy day. The plant stopped burning coal several years ago, but still has coal ash waste on site. (Rebecca Thiele/IPB News)

The Eagle Valley natural gas plant in Martinsville is using water that could be contaminated with toxic coal ash to cool the plant and then putting it back into the White River.

The Hoosier Environmental Council said that violates federal coal ash rules. The group is challenging the state's decision to reissue Eagle Valley's wastewater permit.

AES Indiana converted its Eagle Valley plant from coal to natural gas seven years ago. But there is still coal ash at the site and [monitoring data](#) shows it's leaching toxic heavy metals into the groundwater — like arsenic, boron, lithium, mercury and molybdenum.

Indra Frank with the Hoosier Environmental Council said uptaking this water for cooling pulls the contamination close to Eagle Valley — but that's not the same as a cleanup.

"It's true that that controls the spread in the ground, but then it takes those contaminants and spreads them into the White River," she said.

Frank says, so far, AES's closure plans for its coal ash at Eagle Valley includes consolidating the ash and capping it. The company doesn't mention adding a liner to keep the coal ash from

coming in contact with groundwater.

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In public comments on the draft of Eagle Valley's wastewater permit, the Morgan County Soil and Water Conservation District also expressed concerns about the groundwater pollution.

"Achieving compliance with the ash pond closure and post-closure federal regulations is not possible as long as AES Indiana is continuing to discharge coal combustion residual contaminants from the site to the White River," it said.

Frank said Eagle Valley isn't the only site where groundwater with coal ash is being pumped into the White River. HEC also suspects this is happening near Duke Energy's Noblesville Station and AES's Harding Street Generating Station.

"We're hoping that perhaps by bringing this challenge, we'll also be able to influence what happens at some of the other sites where coal ash contaminated groundwater is going into waterways," she said.

[READ MORE: EPA clarifies coal ash rule, could lead to safer groundwater in Indiana](#)

In an email statement, AES Indiana said it's committed to the safety of the communities it serves:

"AES Indiana, including its Eagle Valley Generating Station, takes pride in its compliance with the environmental regulations and permits issued by regulatory authorities that establish limits and requirements for the purpose of protecting human health and the environment."

Rebecca is our energy and environment reporter. Contact her at rthiele@iu.edu or follow her on Twitter at [@beckythiele](https://twitter.com/beckythiele).

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