

Kerr Reservoir Coal Ash Release Fact Sheet

April 24, 2014

Background

On February 2, 2014, a coal ash release occurred in Eden, N.C., into the Dan River about 15-20 miles upstream of Danville, Va. Federal, state, and local agencies have been working to monitor river water quality and evaluate any potential effects to human health or the environment. The start of the John H. Kerr Reservoir is located about 90 miles downstream of the initial spill. Most of the coal ash was seen in areas upstream of the reservoir, but the Environmental Protection Agency is also collecting water and sediment samples from the reservoir itself to find out if any low levels of coal ash are present. Health officials will continue to provide any updates if needed.

Is exposure to coal ash harmful?

Coal ash is a gray, sand-like waste material that is made up of silica minerals and metals. Direct skin contact with coal ash, or with water and sediment containing coal ash, may cause skin irritation. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services continue to work with federal, state, and local agencies to evaluate water, sediment and fish sampling data and keep residents informed of any health risks.

Is it safe to swim and boat in Kerr Reservoir?

Sample results from the reservoir (for metals) are well below levels of concern for recreational use. However, if a swimmer comes in contact with what appears to be coal ash, health officials recommend thoroughly washing off with soap and water. Illness may occur from other lake water contaminants not associated with coal ash, such as bacteria and viruses. For that reason, it is important that swimmers always avoid swallowing any untreated or unfiltered lake water. If you swallow lake water and become ill, please seek medical attention.

Is it safe to eat fish from Kerr Reservoir?

Due to historical activities not associated with the coal ash release, VDH has an existing fish consumption advisory for the Kerr Reservoir and it includes the Dan River and parts of the Hycroft and Banister rivers. Certain species of fish in these waters contain elevated levels of methylmercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Results of the analysis of fish tissue samples collected from the Dan River after the coal ash release do not warrant additional fish consumption advisories. For more information, visit: www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/DEE/PublicHealthToxicology/Advisories/.

Kerr Reservoir Coal Ash Release Fact Sheet

Kerr Lake in North Carolina is covered by a statewide ban on eating largemouth bass due to methylmercury. For more information on fish consumption advisories in North Carolina visit: <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/oeefish/advisories.html>.

What should I do if I see dry coal ash on the banks of Kerr Reservoir?

If you see what appears to be ash on the banks of the reservoir, call Southside Health District at 434-738-6815 with site directions. Your call will be routed appropriately. You may also email the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at JHKERR@usace.army.mil. If you come in contact with what appears to be ash, wash off with soap and water. Do not kick the ash up and/or do not try to remove it yourself.

Who do I contact with health related questions?

In Virginia, call Southside Health District at 434-738-6815 or 434-799-5190 with questions about swimming, boating or fishing in the Kerr Reservoir. In North Carolina, you may contact the Division of Public Health at 919-707-5900. If you still have health concerns after speaking with public health officials, tell your health care provider and provide them a copy of this fact sheet.