

EPA Expects to Revise Rules for Wastewater Discharges from Power Plants

Release date: 09/15/2009

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WASHINGTON – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency plans to revise the existing standards for water discharges from coal-fired power plants to reduce pollution and better protect America’s water. Wastewater discharged from coal ash ponds, air pollution control equipment, and other equipment at power plants can contaminate drinking water sources, cause fish and other wildlife to die and create other detrimental environmental effects.

Earlier this year, EPA completed a multi-year study of power plant wastewater discharges and concluded that current regulations, which were issued in 1982, have not kept pace with changes that have occurred in the electric power industry over the last three decades. Air pollution controls installed to remove pollution from smokestacks have made great strides in cleaning the air people breathe, saving lives and reducing respiratory and other illnesses. However, some of the equipment used to clean air emissions does so by “scrubbing” the boiler exhaust with water, and when the water is not properly managed it sends the pollution to rivers and other waterbodies. Treatment technologies are available to remove these pollutants before they are discharged to waterways, but these systems have been installed at only a fraction of the power plants.

As part of the multi-year study, EPA measured the pollutants present in the wastewater and reviewed treatment technologies, focusing mostly on coal-fired power plants. Many of the toxic pollutants discharged from these power plants come from coal ash ponds and the flue gas desulfurization systems used to scrub sulfur dioxide from air emissions.

Once the new rule for electric power plants is finalized, EPA and states would incorporate the new standards into wastewater discharge permits.

More information about EPA’s study is provided in an interim report published in August 2008. A final study will be published later this year.

More information on wastewater discharges from power plants:
<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/guide/steam/>