DEQ is finalizing plans for ash pond cleanup

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is moving forward with plans to deal with the 183 million gallons of contaminated water that leak each year from the coal ash ponds outside Colstrip.

Units 3 & 4 ponds - first phase of cleanup plan started

In February, DEQ approved a plan for the Units 3 & 4 ash ponds, located three miles southeast of town in the Rosebud Creek drainage. The 3 & 4 ponds cover 416 acres and leak an estimated 400,000 gallons of contaminated water – per day – into the aquifer.

This plan will require Talen Energy to drain the 3 & 4 ponds starting in 2021, flush contaminated soils with freshwater injection wells, and build new water treatment capacity to treat the roughly 1 billion gallons of contaminated water sitting in the ponds currently. DEQ has requested $107 million in bonding from the owners to cover the costs of this project. This plan requires consistent, ongoing monitoring to evaluate its effectiveness.

Units 1 & 2 ponds - cleanup plan coming this summer

The Units 1 & 2 ponds, located just north of Castle Rock Lake, sit directly in the shallow aquifer feeding into Armells Creek. The ash ponds need to be drained, the coal ash removed (dug up), and stored in a new, lined landfill on Talen property.

Thorough cleanup would employ hundreds of workers during the coming decade and is the only proven way to protect groundwater from toxic coal ash that is sitting within aquifers.

You will have the opportunity to comment on the Units 1 & 2 plan soon. Use that opportunity to tell DEQ to do their job and require a cleanup that protects the people and groundwater of Rosebud County!
“High and Dry” cleanup: A huge job creator that permanently repairs groundwater

Last year, Northern Plains released the second of two reports studying the relationship between coal ash cleanup and job creation. Doing It Right II: Job Creation Through Colstrip Cleanup found that robust cleanup creates hundreds of good-paying industrial jobs, permanently repairs local groundwater, and provides broad economic stimulus for the entire community.

CLEANUP TECHNIQUES REQUIRED TO “DO IT RIGHT”

- Dewatering of coal ash ponds
- Excavation (removal) of coal ash at Units 1 & 2 Ponds and Plant Site Ponds
- Building a new, lined landfill on Talen Property for dry coal ash storage

“High and Dry” cleanup is expected to create

218 FULL-TIME JOBS

That will be sustained for a decade

Thanks to SB 264 passed during the 2019 Montana legislative session, cleanup jobs at Colstrip will be paid at prevailing wage rates. Some examples include $28.95/hour for Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics, $28.20/hour for Operating Engineers and Heavy Equipment Operators, and $37.74/hour for Construction Managers.

JOBS IN EXCAVATION AND WATER TREATMENT

Cleanup that involves excavation and removes contamination requires many different workers with many different skill sets. Here are just SOME of the jobs created by these projects:

- Heavy equipment operator
- Mechanic
- Electrician
- Excavator operator
- Fence erector
- General laborer
- Truck driver
- Site superintendent
- Environmental engineer
- Mechanical engineer
- Civil engineer
- Computer-aided development and design (CADD) specialist
- Septic systems operator
- Surveyor
- Well driller
- Pump installer
- Demolition specialist
- Security guard
- Construction crews
- Septic system installer
- Groundwater sampling technician
- Water treatment plant operator
- Environmental health and safety officer

*The 218 job estimates above refer to the average number of yearly, full-time equivalent jobs. For a more details, download the full Doing it Right II: Job Creation Through Colstrip Cleanup report by visiting www.northernplains.org/colstrip-jobs-study-2/.
A plan that benefits everyone

People in Rosebud County deserve a cleanup plan that provides an enduring future for the Colstrip community. Workers, ranchers, the Northern Cheyenne, and all who are proud to call Rosebud County home want to have good jobs, clean groundwater, and stable property values. Together, we can achieve this, but the Montana DEQ must insist on a “high and dry” cleanup plan.

WATER QUALITY & AGRICULTURE

Groundwater pollution is still a big problem for county residents, especially farmers and ranchers. Coal ash contains heavy metals and contaminants that are dangerous to humans, wildlife, and livestock. Ranchers pay close attention to sulfate levels in the region’s groundwater as they cause polioencephalomalacia (or “brain softening”) in cattle when consumed in high doses (above 3,000 ppm).

To protect local agriculture, Montana DEQ must address the **400,000 gallons of contaminated water that leak every day** from the Units 3 & 4 ponds into area groundwater.

**Coal Ash Pond Water Quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solids</th>
<th>Heavy Metals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SULFATES</td>
<td>BORON</td>
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<tr>
<td>38,700 ppm, mg/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>3,000 ppm, mg/L</td>
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<td>2,645 ppm, mg/L</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDS (Total Dissolved Solids)</td>
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<td>51,600 ppm, mg/L</td>
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<td>4,228 ppm, mg/L</td>
<td>0.096 ppm, mg/L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock limit</td>
<td>Average background level in Rosebud County groundwater</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROPERTY VALUES & COMMUNITY STRENGTH**

Ensuring that good-paying jobs remain in Colstrip can help the community prosper over the long haul. Effective cleanup of Colstrip’s ash ponds can provide those jobs for many in the existing workforce for years to come. This would mean families can stay in their homes, maintaining stable property values, and – more important – maintaining the relationships that friends, neighbors, and families have built over the years.
WE NEED THE DEQ TO PROTECT JOBS, GROUNDWATER, & PROPERTY VALUES

Right now the Montana Department of Environmental Quality is reviewing final plans for the cleanup of Colstrip's ash ponds. A responsible cleanup that uses a “high and dry” approach - digging up the ash and storing it high above groundwater in a newly-built landfill - can create hundreds of industrial jobs using the local workforce at prevailing wages.

A formal comment period is expected to begin in late summer, but you can contact the DEQ now and tell them to support robust cleanup and good jobs by emailing: deqcolstrip@mt.gov.