

TENNESSEAN COM

Coal tainted slurry hits TN's New River from Premium Coal Co.

Coal mining waste has tainted several miles of the New River in East Tennessee in violation of a permit held by Premium Coal at a plant in Devonia, TN, according to state information.

The release of a fine, grayish-black material that results when separating coal from shale and rock is estimated to have lasted 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Jan. 2.

The state was not notified at the time, as required, said Tisha Calabrese-Benton, spokeswoman for the Tennessee Department of Environment said.

Both TDEC and the U.S. Office of Surface Mining had visited the site on Thursday after a complaint was lodged about the pollution.

"The material had adhered to algae on the rocks and was deposited in the quiet areas along the edges of the stream," Calabrese-Benton said in an email responding to questions.

"The material was evident like this for about seven miles downstream of the release site."

This is a water quality issue resulting from

sediment in the stream and is not a danger to the public, she said.

The processing plant was directed to stop operating and discharging from the sediment pond on site until the problem could be identified and fixed.


Premium Coal, which owns the Baldwin processing plant in Devonia, could not be reached for comment.

The Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment, an activist group often involved in coal mining issues, said the "black water" was seen more than 40 miles downstream from the plant.

The plant is located near Frozen Head State Park.

State and federal officials scheduled a meeting with the company that was set for Tuesday.

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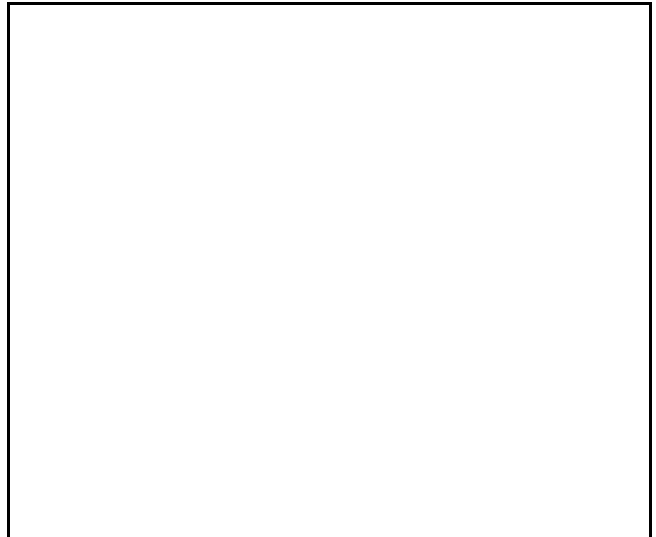
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