Poor West Virginia. When I lived in Washington, D.C., I spent many happy hours in the state of West Virginia, exploring its rock climbing at Seneca Rocks and its skiing at Canaan Valley.

West Virginia is an amazingly beautiful state, but now sadly it is under siege.

On February 11, just one month after a [chemical spill tainted drinking water](https://www.wvxu.org/post/west-virginias-water-crisis-begins-to-work-its-way-into-rivers) for 300,000 people in and around the state’s capital of Charleston, West Virginia experienced another environmental disaster.

### 100,000 Gallons of Coal Slurry Pour Into Stream

From The West Virginia Gazette:

More than 100,000 gallons of coal slurry poured into an eastern Kanawha County stream Tuesday in what officials were calling a “significant spill” from a Patriot Coal processing facility.

Emergency officials and environmental inspectors said roughly six miles of Fields Creek had been blackened and that a smaller amount of the slurry made it into the Kanawha River near Chesapeake.

“This has had significant, adverse environmental impact to Fields Creek and an unknown amount of impact to the Kanawha River,” said Secretary Randy Huffman of the state Department of Environmental Protection.

State officials in West Virginia are scrambling to contain the coal slurry spill, which could affect the Kanawha River, just as they scrambled to contain that toxic chemical spill last month that released
the toxic chemical 4-methylcyclohexanemethanol, or MCHM, into the Elk River, a tributary of that same Kanawha River.

We already know about the many toxic effects of coal, and now here’s another one: malfunctioning equipment.

The spill at Patriot Coal was apparently caused when a valve inside a slurry line malfunctioned, carrying material from the preparation plant to a separate disposal site, not to an impoundment, according to officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Coal slurry or sludge is a waste fluid produced by washing coal with water and chemicals prior to shipping the coal to market. It contains a variety of substances that are likely more toxic than heavy metals, like iron, manganese, aluminum and selenium.

Several Unanswered Questions

Companies are required to immediately report any spills to the DEP. However, although the valve broke sometime between 2:30 and 5:30 early on the morning of February 11, Patriot Coal did not call the DEP to alert them of the leak until 7:40 that morning.

In addition, even though there was an alarm system in place, the alarm failed, so pumps continued to send the toxic slurry through the system. A secondary containment wall around the valve proved to be insufficient; the pumps continued to send slurry to the broken valve, which became overwhelmed and the slurry overflowed the wall and made its way to the creek.

Officials at the company announced immediately that containment efforts and cleanup activities were underway.

“Mine personnel provided notification to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection and all pumping related to the slurry line was promptly discontinued and the discharge ceased. Containment activity began immediately at the site and is continuing in Fields Creek and is our top priority,” Janine Orf, a Patriot spokeswoman, wrote.

Third Coal-Related Pollution Accident in a Month

This is in fact the third significant coal-related water pollution event in the Southeast in the last month. The January 9 event dumped about 10,000 gallons of the toxic chemical into the Elk River just a few miles upstream of a major drinking water intake near Charleston.

Then on February 3, a large pipe under a coal ash pond owned by Duke Energy ruptured in Eden, N.C., sending up to 82,000 tons of ash and 27 million gallons of tainted water into the Dan River about 23 miles upstream of the water intake for the city of Danville, Va.

These three events — a spill of a chemical used by the coal industry, a coal ash spill and now a coal slurry spill — all reveal the complete lack of enforcement of the coal industry. Big Coal has enjoyed political cover for far too long.

The good news is that coal demand in the U.S. fell by 21 percent from 2007 to 2012.

And environmentalists have been working hard to expose the lies of big coal companies. The Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal campaign has pushed 106 of the country’s aging coal-fired power plants into retirement (or to set a retirement date).
As Mary Anne Hitt, director of the Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal campaign, puts it: “Coal is dirty, outdated, and bad for our kids’ health. Coal is a 19th century fuel that is making our country sick and getting in the way of a prosperous future and clean energy jobs.”

Can we please move on to sustainable energy before there any more coal-related disasters?

Read more: http://www.care2.com/causes/more-bad-news-for-west-virginia-coal-gunk-spills-into-creek-turns-it-black.html#ixzz2tSBDYk00