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Kiev, Ukraine

Fires, fatalities and fear. The heart of Ukrainian national protests, Independence Square, erupted in violence on Tuesday, Feb. 18, as police surrounded the Square and began "an anti-terror operation." In less than eight hours, seven policemen, 11 protesters and one government employee were killed, CNN reports. Police demand that the protestors end the unrest and leave the square, while protesters continue to insist that President Viktor Yanukovich resign. As of Wednesday night, 26 people had been killed, including nine police.

Boston, Mass., USA

A team of scientists from Harvard Medical School has been monkeying around. On Tuesday, Feb. 18, they told BBC that "the brain of one monkey (in their laboratory) has been used to control the movements of another 'avatar' monkey." The procedure involved using brain chip implants and electrodes to help match electrical activity in the monkeys' brains. The scientists hope to eventually refine and extend their method to allowing paralyzed people to regain control of their bodies.

Kampala, Uganda

While activists have reported that the Ugandan gay community consists of over 500,000 people, very few Ugandans are openly gay, according to the BBC. As per the new anti-gay bill signed into law by President Yoweri Museveni on Feb. 15, all persons convicted of "aggravated homosexuality" will face life imprisonment. "Aggravated homosexuality" includes incidences of HIV infection, "serial offenders" and sex with minors, according to Amnesty International. The anti-gay bill was passed by a conservative Parliament in December, but President Museveni declined to make his decision until a team of Ugandan scientists concluded "that there was no gene for homosexuality and that it was merely abnormal behavior," CNN reports.

Pyongyang, North Korea

"A shock to the conscience of humanity" is what a U.N. panel branded Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un's human rights abuses, The Telegraph reports. According to The Washington Times, Kim's regime has forced young mothers to drown newborn babies, starved hundreds of thousands of detainees at secret prison camps and held public executions. While U.N. investigators have discussed the possibility of trying Kim for crimes against humanity, one member of the U.N. Security Council — China — chooses to block official recommendations that would warn Kim about his role in North Korea's crimes against humanity.



Duke Energy's grievous error contaminates Dan River

BY EMERSON SANTIAGO
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The Dan River near Eden, N.C., has been transformed into a bubbling cauldron of black muck.

Unfortunately for North Carolinians, this is not a fairy tale; it is a dangerous byproduct of our nation's dependence on coal.

According to CBS News, on Monday, Feb. 3, Duke Energy released an initial statement admitting that 50,000–82,000 tons of coal ash and up to 27 million gallons of tainted water were released from a storage pond in Eden into the Dan River, making it the third largest coal ash spill in U.S. history.

The cause of this incident?

According to the Charlotte Observer, Duke Energy attributed the leakage to a broken 48-inch storm drain that ran under an unlined storage pond for the Dan River Combined Cycle Station. The contents of the pond flowed into the pipe, eventually draining directly into the Dan River.

"I just think it's really sad for the residents who have lived and grown up around that river," said Saidiyya Komma, treasurer of the Early College Environmental Club. "It's been healthy for about 53 years. Now, it's suddenly contaminated, and when summertime comes this year, they probably won't be able to enjoy it like they used to."

This is not the first time Duke Energy has failed to meet state regulations on coal ash storage and handling.

"You may be aware that the state of North Carolina had brought suit against Duke Energy in actions taken last year," said Susan Massengale, representative of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, in an



A broken storm drain under a storage pond in Eden owned by Duke Energy caused the third largest coal ash spill in U.S. history.

email interview.

This lawsuit, currently making its way through the legal process, was filed in an attempt to remedy a variety of contamination issues with Duke Energy facilities including the Dan River disposal site.

For residents who depend on the Dan River for drinking water, news of the coal ash spill could have had more severe implications.

"In the short term, we have been fortunate that the closest drinking water system (in) Danville, Va., and all those further down river have been able to filter the water to meet Environmental Protection Agency drinking water standards," said Massengale.

Unfortunately, the long-term health of the Dan and other waterways damaged by the coal industry is not as clear.

"The story of the long-term impact of the spill and the recovery of the Dan River will be told by the sediment and the heavy metals in the coal ash that has settled on the river bed and along the banks," said Massengale.

Substances such as coal ash and MCHM, byproducts of coal production and usage, are often tested for their effects within the parameters of their intended usage. However, additional information about environmental interactions can be scarce.

"It comes down to economics ... the chemicals that (Duke Energy) was using were safe for what they were being used for," said Bonnie Ware, hydrogeologist for the N.C. DENR. "It is economically infeasible to test the chemicals for every scenario other than what they're actually going to be used for."

Coal ash spills are not the only risk associated with the coal industry. According to CNN, a recent chemical spill in West Virginia's Elk River left over 300,000 residents without access to potable water.

The primary constituent of the spill, MCHM, has yet to be heavily tested for potential environmental impacts.

"River ecosystems are very complicated," said Komma. "The smallest living things, such as macrovertebrates, can affect the entire food web. The river's health is basically determined by those species, and if they can't recover, then I doubt the Dan River will."

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