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# Group wants coal-ash cleanup

**Old dump near police HQ has leaked into soil, groundwater**

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**CHAPEL HILL** A state official told the town this week that it's too soon to say what should be done about coal ash buried decades ago on land that now houses the Chap-

el Hill Police Department. The local environmental group Friends of Bolin Creek asked the Town Council on Wednesday to start cleaning up the site based on the latest report from the town's consultant.

"It would be a grave mistake to follow the lead of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources – whose reputation on coal ash regulation is now discred-

ited on a national level – by allowing the coal ash to remain in an unlined pit in the center of town," the group said in a letter to the town. DENR has come under fire and a federal grand jury investigation for its response to the Duke Energy coal ash spill on the Dan River and its handling of other coal ash sites around the state.

Chapel Hill officials said they don't know where the coal ash

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Chapel Hill town officials have posted coal ash dump letters and reports at [bit.ly/1toqSFS](http://bit.ly/1toqSFS).

came from before being buried just north of Bolin Creek off Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The town bought the property in the early 1980s from the Sparrow fam-

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ily. Before that, the land provided fill dirt for projects in the 1950s and '60s. In the 1970s, the holes left behind were filled.

Town officials now are considering whether to sell the property or use it differently. The town plans to build a new police station in the future.

Falcon Engineering, hired to investigate, told the town last July that more work was needed. The town approved further studies, notified DENR about the potential contamination and installed fencing to limit potential runoff into the creek.

Falcon Engineering officials tested two wells, conducted deep soil probes at several spots and collected samples from Bolin Creek both upstream and downstream of the site. A March report confirmed coal-related contaminants – arsenic, lead, barium, chromium and selenium – had leaked into the soil and groundwater. High levels of mercury also were found in the groundwater, it said.

The study did not find a high concentration of heavy metals in Bolin Creek, it said.

According to the report, only one heavy metal – barium – would affect future development of homes or apartments on the site. Commercial projects could be allowed under existing state standards, it said.

In its letter to the town, however, the Friends of Bolin Creek contend the results overlook the fact that many of those heavy metals exceed environmental standards, even if they don't prevent someone from building on the site.

Testing the creek's surface water may not find coal-ash metals that settled over time and still could be affecting fish, insects or water quality, wrote group president Julie McClintock, who is also a member of the town's Stormwater Advisory Committee and a former Town Council member.

"This type of unpermitted pollution of the creek via hydrologically connected groundwater violates the Clean Water Act," she wrote. "Moreover, the state groundwater regulations require that where the North Carolina groundwater standards have been exceeded, as they already have been here many times over, the polluter must stop the discharges to groundwater and take corrective action to clean up the pollution. Yet that is not what the Town appears to be planning in this case."

The letter asks the town to take three steps:

- Test Bolin Creek – upstream and downstream of the site – for heavy metals that might have settled

- Comply with the federal Clean Water Act prohibition on pollution being leached into Bolin Creek

- Meet the state's requirements that any pollution threatening the creek or contaminated creek water be cleaned up

Qu Qi, a regional supervisor in DENR's Division of Waste Management, said the letter misconstrues the state's position. The investigation is still in its early stages, Qi wrote in a May 28 letter to Chapel Hill Mayor Mark Kleinschmidt.

Groundwater results need to be retested and confirmed, because the water samples were too cloudy, Qi said. Taking new samples with a low-flow groundwater pump could avoid "falsely elevated laboratory results," Qi said

The results of those new samples determine what happens next, Qi said. If there's a high threat of contamination, the Division of Waste Management would lead additional testing and remediation work. If the threat is low, the town could work through the state's Registered Environmental Consultant Program to resolve the risks.

"However, it is premature to speculate about the proper final remedy at this stage," Qi said.

The council referred the matter to staff for discussion at a future meeting.