

LOCAL

Lake Norman cancer survivor sues Duke Energy over coal ash

BY JOE MARUSAK
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A Lake Norman woman who developed kidney cancer sued Duke Energy on Wednesday over its disposal of toxic coal ash near and beneath lake-area homes and businesses in the 1990s and 2000s.

Tanya Hall lives in Sherrills Ford along a cove of the lake. In her lawsuit, she said she only recently discovered “the causal link” between her exposure to

coal ash and her cancer. She found the link in a report by the federal Environmental Protection Agency, she said.

Coal ash is a byproduct of coal burning in coal-fired energy plants, according to the EPA. The agency regulates coal ash because the ash “contains contaminants like mercury, cadmium and arsenic,” according to the EPA website.

“Without proper management, these contaminants can pollute waterways, ground water, drink-

ing water, and the air,” the EPA website says.

Hall has lived near a Duke Energy coal ash storage site for eight years, she said in her lawsuit. The site is along Island Point Road, on Duke Energy property north of its Marshall energy plant.

Hall and her lawyers raised the coal ash link during a news conference Wednesday at the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Charlotte. Hall filed her lawsuit that day in Mecklenburg County Superior Court

because Duke Energy is based in Charlotte.

Coal ash led to a spike in thyroid cancer rates and other ailments in nearby Mooresville, the lawsuit said.

“This lawsuit is about holding (Duke Energy) accountable for the harm caused and demanding justice for the families who have suffered far too long,” lawyer Carlos Moore of Mississippi-based Carlos Moore Law Group said at the news conference.

Hall and her legal team “are calling for a full investigation into this public health crisis,” said another lawyer representing her, N. John Bey of Atlanta-based law firm Bey & Associates.

The lawsuit also seeks monetary and other compensation to be determined at trial.

In a statement to The Charlotte Observer on Thursday, a Duke Energy

spokesman said the company’s ash sales “were conducted in accordance with applicable state regulations, which set out how ash could be used in ways that are safe for people and the environment.

“As regulations changed over the years, our structural fill practices evolved to comply with all applicable rules,” according to the statement.

“It’s always challenging when people have health issues and are searching for answers, and there are countless risk factors that can contribute to someone’s health condition,” the Duke Energy statement said.

The company is aware of no scientific evidence supporting a link “between health effects and coal ash,” according to the statement. “And there is a considerable body of scientific research that runs counter to such speculation.

“The ingredients in coal ash have been well-studied over many years,” the statement continued. “Critically, experts researching these local concerns, including North Carolina’s health department, reviewed the medical literature and confirmed there is no known connection to coal ash.”

In April, Mooresville Mayor Chris Carney announced plans by the town to buy and clean up a longtime toxic coal ash site along busy N.C. 150, just east of Interstate 77 exit 36, The Charlotte Observer reported at the time.

Carney said taxpayers would not be on the hook for the cost of buying and cleaning up the property because grants will cover the town’s costs. The mayor said Duke Energy agreed to remove the coal ash.

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Country star drops midnight surprise on storm-ravaged NC: ‘It just didn’t feel right to wait’

BY THÉODEN JANES
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A week ago, North Carolina’s Eric Church — the 10-time-Grammy-nominated singer responsible for country-music hits like “Springsteen” and “Drink in My Hand” — had no plans to release new music in 2024.

Then Hurricane Helene swept through his home state, leaving many of the parts he’s most familiar

with totally devastated.

And in response, at midnight Friday, the 47-year-old native of Granite Falls (a small town northwest of Hickory) released a surprise single he said was dedicated to “the unsung heroes, the people who show up when the world’s falling apart.”

But Church added an even bigger twist: He signed over all of his publishing royalties for “Darkest Hour,” according to a news release, “to

the people of North Carolina.”

“We’ve been helping with boots on the ground efforts,” the 2000 App State grad said in a statement, “but this is something that will live beyond just the immediate recovery. This is not a quick thing to fix, so hopefully ‘Darkest Hour’ will be able to contribute to that for a long time to come.

“This song goes to my home, North Carolina, now and forever.”

Royalties from “Darkest Hour” will be funneled to and distributed by Church’s Chief Cares Fund (which plays on the “Chief” nickname he inherited from his grandfather, a former police

chief of Granite Falls).

The charity also will be assisting “in all states and communities affected from Appalachia to the Gulf,” the news release said.

“When the night’s at its blackest, this is for those who are holding the light, guiding the lost and pulling us through,” Church said of “Darkest Hour.” “The message of the song specifically in this time is about Hurricane Helene and the people that need help, but in a broader view, it’s about any challenging times that we have in our life.”

A sampling of the lyrics: *All I really know is I never know*

What’s coming around the bend

*But you should know you’re not alone
Hang on and hold my hand*

*In your darkest hour
Baby I’d come runnin’
In your darkest hour
I’d light your way
Baby don’t give up
I’ll do everything in my power*

To take even a minute off your darkest hour

“It’s always important to know that in your darkest hour,” he explained, “there are people that will come running, there are people that will help. And I think it’s also important to be one of the people that go running when other people need help.”

The song marks the first

new solo release in more than three years from Church, a part-time resident of Banner Elk.

“I’ve been in the studio for a while,” the singer said in his statement, “trying some different things and exploring creativity. ...

“We were going to wait to release music until next year, but it just didn’t feel right to wait with this song. Sometimes you give songs their moment and sometimes they find their own moment.”

“Darkest Hour” can be streamed here.

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