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Environmental Organizations React to ArcelorMittal Investigation Report

Portage, IN – Earlier this week, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) released its investigation report on August’s fish kill in the East Branch of the Little Calumet River. The report includes details on the incident and its cause, the response from both IDEM and ArcelorMittal, and the description of violations that occurred. The report points to a series of events which ultimately led to the toxic release of cyanide and ammonia nitrogen into the waterway that flows into Lake Michigan. Moreover, the report also indicates that ArcelorMittal had full knowledge of the equipment failure that would result in the “continuous release of thousands of gallons per minute of blast furnace gas washing wastewater, known, by the nature of its origin, to contain pollutants including Cyanide, to a treatment plant not designed or equipped to treat Cyanide.” Environmental organizations Save the Dunes, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Surfrider Foundation Chicago Chapter, Indiana Wildlife Federation, Hoosier Environmental Council, Izaak Walton League and Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter found the report shocking.



“There is overwhelming evidence that ArcelorMittal knew early on that, due to its equipment failure, cyanide would be destined for the river,” says Natalie Johnson, executive director of Save the Dunes. “The egregious decision to not mitigate the impact or immediately report to IDEM, drinking water utilities, or the National Park is absolutely unacceptable.”

“ArcelorMittal is responsible and should be held accountable for dozens of violations of the Clean Water Act, way beyond the one addressed in the IDEM report,” said Howard Learner, executive director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center. “That’s why the Environmental Law & Policy Center and the Hoosier Environmental Council served a 60-day notice of intent to bring a Clean Water Act enforcement lawsuit against ArcelorMittal for more than 100 violations of its permit, including water quality violations that harm ecological and public health.”

From Mitch McNeil of the Surfrider Foundation Chicago Chapter: "The actions taken by ArcelorMittal to knowingly and negligently send cyanide-tainted wastewater into Lake Michigan, as described in this report, are criminal. The steel industry is important to the economy, but so is Lake Michigan. Lake Michigan supports wildlife, recreation, commerce, and is a source of drinking water. Treating the lake as a dumping ground with such blatant disregard for its beneficial uses is unacceptable, and actions to that effect taken by ArcelorMittal, U.S. Steel, or any other company cannot be tolerated."

“Research shows that chemical spills into aquatic habitats can have cascading effects that can impact wildlife and the food web for years after the incident,” says Emily Wood, executive director of the Indiana Wildlife Federation. “With the number of threats already putting pressure on our Great Lakes ecosystems, we have no room for companies acting without integrity.”

From Dr. Indra Frank, director of environmental health and water policy with the Hoosier Environmental Council: "ArcelorMittal's irresponsible actions documented in this report deserve a significant penalty, one large enough to serve as a strong incentive to do better in the future."



“We are very concerned about the continuing history of the steel industry exceeding its permits and not timely reporting. This puts at risk the drinking water for millions of Americans and threatens the sporting fishing industry,” said Dean Farr, Izaak Walton League. “We hope that IDEM and the industry will develop best practices to responsibly produce steel while sustaining both the environment and the economy.”

"The report reveals a remarkable level of disrespect on ArcelorMittal's part for public safety, wildlife impacts, and IDEM's regulatory authority," says Bowden Quinn, director of the Sierra Club Hoosier Chapter. "I hope the department comes down hard on the company for this flagrant disregard of proper operating procedures."

Violations identified in the report include discharges not allowable under the facility's NPDES permit, failure to provide required notifications, failure to efficiently operate and maintain facility in good working order at all times, failure to mitigate adverse impact, and numerous effluent limitation violations. The violations identified in the report have been referred to the IDEM Office of Water Quality Enforcement Section for further action. Such enforcement actions may include the payment of civil penalties, the reimbursement of response costs, and damages incurred as a result of the spill.

The full report and corresponding documents are available at www.in.gov/idem/cleanwater/2576.htm.



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