

"E" - NOTES

NEWSLETTER OF THE OHIO VALLEY ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

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PO Box 970 Proctorville OH 45669

OVEC REPORT COMPARES ASHLAND OIL TO OTHER REFINERIES

In January, OVEC released a report comparing Ashland Oil's air pollution to that of other large refineries in the country. The data, obtained from the EPA, shows that the Catlettsburg refinery releases far more air pollution (per barrel of oil processed) than most other refineries. Although the company's many advertisements claim the refinery is "State-of-the-Art", the data shows that it is among the worst in the nation in terms of air pollution.

The report also gives the views of government regulators at the state and federal level, who point out that the refinery's problems stem from a lack of adequate controls made possible by the company's unwillingness to cooperate with government, and the inability of the State of Kentucky to force Ashland to obey the law.

The purpose of the report was to publicize the truth, and to increase the pressure on the company and the state to upgrade the refinery. The report was front page news in five newspapers and was carried on statewide radio in West Virginia and Ohio. Unfortunately, Ashland Oil responded to the report and all the media coverage with the usual barrage of silly denials. Some of the excuses

they offered even conflicted with each other. Unfortunately the company not only seems to be behind the times in terms of technology, but also in the way they treat the concerned public. The company's newsletter for employees compared us to "communists".

The findings of our report are consistent with three memos which OVEC obtained from the US EPA, after a year long Freedom-of-Information Act quest. These memos point out that many of the problems at Ashland's refinery were solved years ago at Texas refineries.

Contact us for a copy of the report and our responses to the excuses Ashland Oil offered in its defense. A donation of \$5 will cover the costs of printing and mailing the report.

To ask for better pollution control at Ashland Oil, write to:

Mr. Phillip Shepherd
Secretary
KY Environmental Cabinet
5th Floor--Capitol Plaza Tower
Frankfort KY 40601

PULP MILL PROPOSED FOR MASON COUNTY WILL THE COMPANY ACT RESPONSIBLY?

An international corporation has proposed building the largest pulp and paper mill in North America in Mason County, WV. Some have claimed it would be the largest US industrial project in a decade. The mill would take advantage of the Ohio River, the good rail system and the region's forests that are becoming ripe for harvest. Unfortunately, the company may also be interested in taking advantage of the lack of timbering regulations, and state government's apparent willingness to bend environmental rules in order to make life easier for companies wishing to use outdated technology.

The Alabama River Pulp and Paper Company, a subsidiary of Parsons and Whittemore, began their quest for permits by asking the state of WV to loosen water standards so that the company could discharge 90 times as much dioxin into the Ohio River as is recommended by the US EPA. The DNR's Water Resources Board quickly obliged the company, but the state legislature must give final approval, and that won't happen this year.

Dioxin is one of the most toxic substances known to science. A minority of scientists now say that it is not as strong a carcinogen as once thought, but recent studies have shown the chemical to be far more toxic in other ways than was previously realized. Especially worrisome are the effects it has on the human immune system.

OVEC and MACE member Donnie Gillespie, a neighbor of the proposed site, points out that this is not a jobs-vs.-the-environment issue. "We know this mill could be built chlorine-free so that dioxins would not be produced", he said. British Columbia, home of many paper mills, has recently set a strict timetable for paper mills to eliminate the use of the old chlorine technology that causes the dioxin problem. There is a growing demand for dioxin free paper. Time magazine announced earlier this year that they would buy only dioxin free paper as soon as it is available in sufficient quantities. (This newsletter and other OVEC publications are printed on dioxin free paper.)

The company is sending mixed signals on their intentions. On the one hand, they've said that their plans have been slowed by a glut in the paper market. On the other hand, they've simultaneously sent out press releases touting the benefits of the mill, and last month signed an option to buy the one thousand acre site in Mason County.

According to Donnie Gillespie, an attitude of secrecy on the part of the company has prevailed. "The company has always been tight-lipped, it's hard to know what's going on."

The paper mill of tomorrow will use a large amount of recycled paper instead of only virgin timber, and will not use unnecessary and polluting chlorine bleaching. Doesn't our region deserve a modern plant, rather than a polluting dinosaur?

GARBAGE

Huntington's garbage problems have been ignored for a long time. Last year, Mayor Nelson proposed a new landfill to replace the current one which is being shut down by the DNR. Unfortunately, instead of also calling for a sensible recycling program to cut down on landfill trash, he proposed spending millions of dollars to build a "Materials Recovery Facility" to sort through the trash after its been tossed out and mixed up. This simply caters to those who are too lazy to sort their own trash for recycling, and uses tax dollars to pay someone else to do it. Recyclables from such a facility are naturally dirty and harder to market. The Cabell County Solid Waste Authority recently voted not to approve the MRF at this time, but the Mayor is still pushing it.

The mayor also proposed burning the leftover trash to reduce the volume (a lot of ash is still produced and goes to the landfill). A garbage incinerator can cause serious air pollution problems, so this is a bad idea for an area that already suffers from poor air quality. These high-tech solutions hide the problems and create new ones.

OVEC's Alice Horn is leading the fight for a solid waste plan featuring curbside recycling instead of an MRF and garbage incineration, and for justice for the landfill neighbors. Water tests have found contamination in some neighbors wells, but since it's very hard to prove that the landfill caused the contamination, Alice's pleas for city water for landfill neighbors have fallen on deaf ears.

The mayor is hoping the DNR will grant a waiver to allow the new landfill

to be only 200 feet from neighbor's wells, contrary to the usual requirements. "I don't think the city would even consider doing this if it were not a poor neighborhood", says Alice. For more information, call her at 523-2898.

OVEC NETS \$6,500 GRANT

OVEC has been notified that we'll receive a \$6,500 grant from Partnership for Democracy. We've been working with Pete MacDowell of Partnership, who has been helping us to write other grant requests. We hope to raise enough money to hire an organizer, someone whose main job will be to make personal contacts, with the goal of educating more people and stimulating more active involvement in Tri-State environmental issues. Foundations like to support groups which receive many individual donations. Donations to OVEC are tax-deductible.

DC CONFERENCE

OVEC research coordinator Rick Bady was invited to speak at a January conference in Washington on the use of Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) data. The data shows how much of certain toxic chemicals are released by large industrial facilities. OVEC has used the data to report on releases to the air in the Tri-State by major facilities (see our report: "Release of Hazardous Air Pollutants in the Tri-State). The data was also used in our study comparing releases from Ashland Oil with other US oil refineries. The use of the data to compare facilities nationwide was a unique effort.

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