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T O X I C T I D I N G S

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OVEC COMMENTARY

"All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to stand by and do nothing."

I'm not quite sure who to attribute that quote to but based on recent events it sure is appropriate.

Recently, backlash at the environmental movement has turned ugly. In California, a bomb exploded in a forest preservationist's car seriously injuring two people. In Alabama, a Greenpeace activist's home was burned, causing her to lose over 20 years of work.

Closer to home, friends of mine in other areas of WV have been shot at, had rocks thrown at their homes, and endured personal attacks publicly.

While OVEC has often been criticized for its efforts, recent attacks at the group and its leaders have turned bitter, dishonest and vicious. Letters to newspapers from Ashland Oil supporters and the AO Employee Action Group have also attacked refinery neighbors suing the company.

I can only hope the general public sees these cheap shots, threats and intimidation for what they really are; desperate attempts by those who deface and defile our planet for the sake of the almighty dollar. This enables them to hide behind the shallow, crumbling veil of corporate hypocrisy,

where omnipotence turns to impotence when truth is revealed.

As individuals and a group, we must be careful not to be drawn into these dirty tactics. Name calling, or worse, only diverts attention from the real issues--whether it is saving the spotted owl, halting corporate injustice or fighting for clean air and water to protect our children's health.

A friend once told me that the letters to the editor which blast OVEC are the best advertisements money doesn't have to buy. Maybe she was right.

I am concerned that such negative publicity turns off those who sit on the fence on controversial issues. But that's how this country was born, sticking up for what you believe in and doing what is right. Over 200 years ago, that was the American way. What's happened?

With our life support system in peril, maybe some day those fence-sitters or opponents will see the light, but until then, and like the quote I began with, I truly believe what we are doing is right. As Edward Abbey, my favorite author said:

"We have the right to resist and the obligation; not to defend that which we love would be dishonorable."

-- Peace, Love and Respect


Brian Hagenbuch

EPA CHARGES AOI WITH VIOLATIONS

In late April, the EPA issued a violation notice to Ashland Oil stemming from an EPA inspection of the refinery in January. OVEC received a copy of the notice which charges AOI with the following:

- Failure to properly maintain valves;
- Air pollution (NOX) emissions from the RCC unit in excess of permitted levels;
- Improper use of by-pass vent to emit particulates and other pollutants. (This is the same by-pass vent that the company did not admit existed in their construction permit.)
- Constructing and operating heaters in violation of permit specifications;
- Using fuels with higher than allowable levels of hydrogen sulfide, a toxic pollutant;
- Failure to correctly report various data.

Assuming that AOI takes their usual approach of stalling at every possible step, it could take years for the government to take action.

The EPA could fine AOI, order them to make improvements, revoke federal contracts, and/or even put the AO bosses in jail! Most likely, AO will pay a fine and enter into another "agreed order" to fix things up.

The question remains whether they will obey the federal government any better than the State of KY. OVEC has requested that EPA strictly enforce the laws and force AOI into regulatory compliance.

OVEC FACT SHEETS

Add these Fact Sheets to your library. Call OVEC for copies:

- Hazardous Air Pollutants
- Carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide in the Tri-State
- Ashland Oil: Why the Focus?

AOI MALFUNCTIONS STILL A PROBLEM CITIZEN EFFORTS NEEDED!!

In December, 1990, the U.S. EPA reported the Tri-State had serious air quality problems, caused in part by frequent industry malfunctions. The EPA presented strong evidence that human health is being damaged by poisons in the air.

Frequent malfunctions continue. In the past several weeks, the AO refinery had a hydrogen flouride leak that injured two workers, a leak of benzene, toluene and xylene, and high carbon monoxide emissions.

AOI has high paid employees and lawyers to convince government regulators, the media and public that its "No Problem".

The only way to counteract industry influence is to make sure government officials hear from citizens who want clean air and an end to malfunctions.

Please write your concerns to Hisham Sa'aid, KY Div. for Air Quality, 316 St. Clair Mall, Frankfort, KY 40601 and Greer Tidwell, U.S. EPA Region IV, 345 Courtland St. Atlanta GA, 30365.

ASHLAND NOT ONLY COMPANY WITH LEAKS

On July 10, 3 pounds of bromine, a toxic gas, leaked from AKZO Chemical plant near Gallipolis Ferry, WV (about 25 miles north of Huntington).

Local residents were quickly told to close all windows, turn off air conditioners and stay indoors as a precaution.

OVEC PETITION DRIVE

OVEC has initiated a petition drive to Senator Byrd, asking that he require EPA to carry out recommendations from the EPA Tri-State air and health studies. If you would like petition copies, contact OVEC.

LETS COMPARE APPLES AND DIOXINS

On June 20, the WV Water Resources Board held a public hearing to determine setting a dioxin standard for WV. This is the first step in the permitting process for the Apple Grove Pulp Mill.

Apple Grove will be the only permitted source of dioxins in the Ohio River between Pittsburgh and Louisville. Apple Grove, located about 20 miles north of Huntington, wants to discharge dioxins into the Ohio at rates about 100 times greater than federal standards.

OVEC was well represented at the hearing. Rick Bady discussed the fallacies of risk assessment and Brian Hagenbuch used a fish demonstration to measure the potential uptake of dioxins which would be consumed by people. Bill Ragette, Bill Beard and other OVEC members countered industry arguments of a safe dioxin level.

OVEC made the following recommendations to the Board:

- 1) NO NEW DISCHARGES OF DIOXIN INTO WV WATERS;
- 2) 5-YEAR PHASE OUT FOR EXISTING DIOXIN SOURCES;
- 3) NO INCREASES IN EXISTING PERMIT DISCHARGES;
- 4) ACCEPT EPA STANDARDS FOR OTHER DISCHARGES;
- 5) STUDY FISH CONSUMPTION RATES TO MORE ACCURATELY DETERMINE POLLUTION IMPACT;
- 6) DETERMINE TOTAL ORGANIC HALOGEN LOAD INTO WV WATERS AND DEVELOP A STANDARD;
- 7) DIOXIN SHOULD BE INTENSELY MONITORED BEFORE AND AFTER PERMITTING DISCHARGES.

The Water Resources Board decision will be made before September 1 and must be approved by the state legislature, Governor and EPA before it is implemented.

TRI-STATE NEARLY HAS TOXIC TRAGEDY

On June 19, Ashland Oil had a 250 lb. leak of hydrogen flouride (HF). HF is a poisonous gas which forms a ground-hugging vapor cloud at room temperature. Industry studies indicate a 1000 gallon, 2 minute leak could be lethal to people 5 miles downwind. Ashland claims the gas was "confined" to company property and was later flushed into waste water treatment facilities.

In the AOI accident, 2 refinery workers were burned. HF can cause severe burns and eye irritation which may lead to permanent visual defects, destroy tissue in the esophagus and stomach, and cause lung irritation or pulmonary edema, in which the lungs fill with fluid. Chronic effects from a limited exposure are unknown.

HF leaks and explosions have killed people and/or caused serious injuries in Texas, California Oklahoma and elsewhere.

The chemical is such a risk that 50% of U.S. refineries use sulfuric acid instead of HF. While sulfuric acid is also hazardous, it is a liquid at room temperatures and can be more easily controlled. Ashland claims they can "safely handle" HF!! (And donkeys can fly)!

CONGRESS SWAMPED

While OVEC is primarily a toxics-oriented group, several members are also active in preservation issues.

Project Director Brian Hagenbuch was invited by Rep. Bob Wise to testify at a congressional hearing on proposed national wetlands legislation. A few years ago, Brian was very active in wetlands issues in the Tri-State.

OVEC supports Pres. Bush's No Net Loss initiative and strengthening wetlands protection in the Clean Water Act.

TOXIC DUMPS IN HUNTINGTON

In 1990, OVEC petitioned the EPA for Superfund assessment of toxic dumps along the Guyandotte River in Huntington. The dumps were formerly owned by Standard Ultramarine, Chemetron and now BASF. The WV Division of Highways is responsible for dumps on side of the river next to the Guyandotte boat ramp.

This summer, OVEC has been pushing the EPA and State to fence off the dumps to prevent children from playing on them. While fences have not been erected, the DOH has paved over the top of their dump.

OVEC tried to stop the paving to no avail. The EPA has not yet completed its study of the site, so the action was at best premature. DOH may have actually created a larger problem.

While we wait for the EPA results, we are still pushing agencies to fence off the site. Letters asking the state to put up fencing around the Guyandotte River toxic dumps should be sent to John Ranson, Secretary of Commerce, Labor and Env. Resources, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305.

WAYNE FOREST STRIP MINING FOUGHT

OVEC Water Quality Chair Dan Kash petitioned the U.S. Forest Service, on behalf of OVEC, to appeal a Federal Judge's decision allowing strip mining in 5000 acres of the Wayne National Forest.

If allowed, this would be the only strip mine in national forests east of the Mississippi River and prohibitions on strip mining could be jeopardized in all national forests.

Dan helped organize major citizen opposition to the decision. Late news indicates the US Justice Department has agreed to appeal the ruling.

BUREAUCRATIC COVERUP FOR AOI?

OVEC has obtained two versions of a KY Division for Air Quality (DAQ) document that tells two very different tales of the sulfur dioxide (SO₂) problem in the Tri-State.

Technical staff at DAQ wrote a report about the new Clean Air Act amendments and what this will mean to KY. OVEC requested copies from several different offices in Frankfort. About the cause of the SO₂ problem, one version said:

"A preliminary data analysis indicates that a major portion of the problem is caused by periodic shutdowns and malfunctions of a sulfur recovery unit at the Ashland Oil, Inc., Catlettsburg Refinery. Meetings are scheduled with Ashland Oil, Inc. to discuss the problem."

But a different version of the report says:

"A preliminary data analysis indicates that a major portion of the problem is caused by periodic shutdowns and malfunctions of pollution control equipment. The US EPA and the KY DAQ are examining these data to determine whether specific regulatory changes will be required."

We're not sure which versions came from which offices, but its not hard to guess which is the original and which is the sanitized version. Apparently, some people in KY government think their job is to protect Ashland Oil rather than people.

OVEC needs your help to continue the fight for a clean environment. Won't you please join/rejoin OVEC today. Memberships are \$5. Donations tax-exempt.

TOXIC RELEASE REPORT AVAILABLE

OVEC Technical Advisor Rick Bady has produced a detailed report of toxic chemicals emitted into Tri-State air. Local industries release over 3 million pounds of "hazardous air pollutants" (HAPs) into the air each year. Major sources were Ashland Oil, Armco Coke and Steel, Aristech, Dow and Allied-Signal.

The report includes data on the "most toxic" chemicals and carcinogens. Together, AOI and Armco emitted over 75% of the cancer-causing chemicals in 1989. The report is free to OVEC members, \$3 to non-members. Contributions to cover costs are appreciated. Call (614) 886-5796.

OVEC IN DEMAND

OVEC leaders have recently been invited to speak at several important events, including a symposium on the future of the environmental and other citizens movements at Jackson's Mill on July 20. Representatives from several groups and states attended.

On July 22, OVEC was invited to present testimony at a Congressional hearing on wetlands that was held in Charleston and sponsored by Rep. Wise.

In August, OVEC will be on a panel discussing the environmentalist--union cooperation at the National Greens annual convention in Elkins, WV. OVEC, which is not affiliated with the U.S. Green Party, will also lead a workshop on Ashland Oil pollution issues.

In November, OVEC has been invited to discuss toxics use reduction versus pollution control at a symposium in WV's Northern Panhandle. Citizens in that area have been fighting construction of the largest hazardous waste incinerator in the country.

While our calendar is busy, we would be happy to speak to any formal or informal group interested in Tri-State environmental issues. Call (614) 886-5796 or (304) 525-4803.

CP AND CO

Earlier this year, Ashland Oil malfunctions resulted in high emissions of carbon monoxide (CO), a colorless, odorless gas. Downwind in Kenova, citizens complained of health problems typical of CO overexposure, including headaches and dizziness.

AOI claimed CO overexposure couldn't be the problem since no proof existed that ambient air levels for CO were dangerously high.

OVEC and refinery neighbors pointed out that no government CO monitor existed downwind of the refinery! OVEC then asked the WV Air Pollution Control Commission to set up a CO monitor in Kenova, and received a written commitment from APCC Director Dale Farley.

During the week of July 10, AOI again released high amounts of CO, and again claimed citizen's illness reports were unfounded. A number of OVEC members again contacted KY and WV officials demanding a CO monitor be placed in Kenova.

Several days later, WV installed a CO monitor near Kenova. CP!! Citizen Pressure, was instrumental in getting the CO monitor! Thanks to all who played a role in this victory!!

HATS OFF TO GROWL

Congratulations to Greenup Residents Opposed to Waste Landfills (GROWL) for their recent court victory! GROWL has fought a proposed 937-acre KY landfill for four years. Without GROWL's tenacious and dedicated efforts, out-of-state trash be a far greater problem than it already is!

