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LCP BRIDGE STREET CLEAN-UP IS MORE OF A COVER-UP; HUNDREDS OF TONS OF ELEMENTAL MERCURY LEFT BEHIND

Onondaga Nation Report Details Vast Pool of Mercury Below the Surface, Urges Complete Clean-Up of All Toxic Waste

Syracuse, NY – The Onondaga Nation today released a report charging that Honeywell and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) have ignored 100 to 400 tons of elemental mercury, enough to fill at least 18 million thermometers, throughout the clean-up process of the Linden Chemical and Plastics (LCP) Bridge Street Superfund Site.

“We don’t understand the point of a clean-up plan if it leaves behind vast amounts of toxic waste for generations to come,” said Jeanne Shenandoah of the Onondaga Nation. “The point of a clean up is to restore the environment to its natural state. NYSDEC and Honeywell are putting up a big ‘do not enter’ sign and walking away, leaving Central New York to flounder in this mercury cesspool.”

“NYSDEC and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) divided the Onondaga Lake superfund site into nine different subsites—and for each subsite the majority of mercury and other toxic wastes are being left in place,” said Joe Heath, General Counsel for the Onondaga Nation. “The economy of Syracuse and Onondaga County is tied to the health of Onondaga Lake. If all this poison lies beneath a capped façade, our children’s health and prosperity become pipedreams.”

The Linden Chemical and Plastics (LCP) site on Belle Isle Road in the Village of Solvay and Town of Geddes first produced chemicals in 1908. The site is roughly 20 acres and lies about a mile southwest of Onondaga Lake. Production facilities on the site produced much of the mercury and toxics that lie at the bottom of the lake, a separate subsite of the Onondaga Lake superfund clean-up where the majority of the waste will also be capped.

In criticizing the LCP clean-up, the Onondaga report highlights findings from the Atlantic States Legal Foundation (ASLF) that estimated hundreds of tons of elemental mercury reside in the lower aquifer underneath the site. The clean-up plan proposes to build an underground wall surrounding the mercury and assumes that this wall and the ‘glacial till’ underneath the pool will prevent the mercury from spreading out from the site.

The report draws from the public comments of ASLF as well as the Onondaga County Office of the Environment, New York State Assemblymember Joan Christensen, the Sierra Club, the Onondaga Nation Council of Chiefs, and residents of the Syracuse and Liverpool, whose criticisms of the clean-up include:

1. The state's plan will not adequately protect human health and the environment.
2. The pool of elemental mercury should be completely removed. It is not enough to attempt to contain it onsite, given the uncertainties about the size and stability of the pool.
3. The State's plan is not a permanent remedy.
4. The slurry wall and glacial till may not prevent the migration of elemental mercury. A similar slurry wall on a toxic site in Oswego failed in just a few years.
5. Blocking groundwater flows to the West Flume will not be enough to contain the elemental mercury if the pool does migrate below the glacial till.
6. Testing has not shown the current extent of the migrating mercury, nor can current testing predict the rate at which the mercury would migrate.
7. The calculations that the State used to conclude that elemental mercury has already migrated as far as it can are insufficient and unreliable.
8. The State's assumption that the pH levels of the aquifers will prevent the conversion of elemental mercury to dissolved (methyl) mercury is overly optimistic.

Additionally:

9. The Atlantic States Legal Foundation contends that the liquid mercury should be recovered using wells, which would be more effective and longer lasting.
10. Onondaga County proposed a more soundly designed monitoring network to better identify the exact nature of the mercury pool.
11. Onondaga County asserts that the elemental mercury is actually more likely to convert to methyl mercury due to increased concentrations of chloride (which affects pH levels).

For hundreds of years, the ancestors of the Onondaga have lived on the shores of Onondaga Lake. A century of degradation caused by callous corporations and indifferent government officials has transformed the Lake into a toxic pool hostile to fish, wildlife, and humans alike. Left alone or subjected to sham or token clean-up efforts, the Lake and its environs will never regain its health and ecological balance.

“We are confronting the toxic legacy of more than a century of chemical production on what used to be healthy, thriving body of water in Central New York,” concluded Ms. Shenandoah. “Onondaga Lake is sacred to our Nation. We can't let Honeywell's publicity machine squander this opportunity to reclaim Onondaga Lake for generations to come.”

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