

Post-Tribune Nov. 19, 2009, A2

Few questions answered

By Gitte Laasby

Post-Tribune staff writer

BURNS HARBOR -- Nearly everyone who hoped to get answers about ArcelorMittal's proposed landfill -- including "Easterly's Pile" -- and what's going in it walked away disappointed Wednesday.

Around 40 people attended the company's public meeting, many of them hoping to get some answers about technical features of the landfill, whether waste piles at the facility will be landfilled and whether the landfill is even necessary.

"What a joke!" one attendee said as he left the meeting without answers to his questions.

Questioners were repeatedly referred to the company's 3,000-page permit application, the company's hotline and e-mail, and a public hearing that the Indiana Department of Environmental Management is holding in Portage on Dec. 2.

"The focus of the meeting is on the landfill permit application. We'll request that the questions or comments relate to that question," said Jessica DeMonte, an attorney representing ArcelorMittal at the start of the meeting.

"I was amazed. It didn't seem like they answered any questions at all," said Kim Ferraro, an attorney for the Legal Environmental Aid Foundation in Valparaiso, after the meeting. "I looked at the permit documents and there were questions I was not able to answer. All I wanted to know was whether the waste up in the northeast corner would be landfilled and I could not get an answer. It was a perfectly relevant question."

In an investigation Sunday and Monday, the Post-Tribune revealed that the company hasn't been clear about what waste it intends to landfill and what's in the waste. The investigation also revealed that IDEM Commissioner Tom Easterly was in charge of environmental matters at then-Bethlehem Steel while the company illegally dumped steel waste in the northeast corner of its property -- what is now called "Easterly's Pile." It's unclear whether that waste will be landfilled.

"We want to thank you for your question and comments. This is related to the permit application. The scope of this meeting is limited to the landfill application," DeMonte said when Ferraro asked whether the waste will be landfilled.

"You don't think the waste relates to the permit application?" Ferraro asked.

"The permit application details what waste has been included or is proposed to be included," DeMonte replied.

"I'm asking because I can't determine whether the waste is going into the landfill," Ferraro said.

Another attendee, Daniel Goldfarb, who is a member of ArcelorMittal's citizen advisory committee, said he feels the company has been "very open and transparent" about its landfill application. Fellow committee member Charlotte Read disagreed, saying the company initially avoided disclosing it had stockpiled 700,000 tons of waste that it intends to landfill. The short question-and-answer session followed a quick presentation by company representatives about the landfill design, which company representatives said will be more restrictive than IDEM requires.

ArcelorMittal hotline for questions

ArcelorMittal Burns Harbor maintains a hotline for questions.

Call 787-3333. You can also e-mail burnsharborinfo@arcelormittal.com.

For further information, you can also contact Alicia Brown at the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

Call (800) 451-6027, press 0 and ask for Alicia Brown, or ask for extension 2-8734, or dial (317) 232-8734.

IDEM will hold a public meeting on Dec. 2 to take comments and questions, but answers will be provided at a later date.

View the permit application

Visit the Westchester Public Library, 200 W. Indiana Ave. in Chesterton.

Or visit the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's virtual file cabinet online at <http://bit.ly/19tbT4>

Under "facility," search for "Deerfield Storage Facility."

Submit comments to IDEM

Mail to Alicia Brown, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Office of Land Quality, Solid Waste Permits Section, 100 N. Senate Ave., Rm. 1154, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2251. You can also fax to (317) 232-3403 or e-mail albrown@idem.in.gov.

Photo captions:

Attorney Kim Ferraro of Legal Environmental Aid Foundation of Indiana, Inc. asks a question Wednesday during a public meeting at Burns Harbor Town Hall on a proposed ArcelorMittal landfill application. photos by scott M Bort -- Post-Tribune

Larry Davis of Hebron and an ArcelorMittal Burns Harbor plant employee of 31 years, asks a question about the environmental impact.