

Post-Tribune Dec. 6, 2009, A5

ArcelorMittal: 'We'll recycle some waste'

By Gitte Laasby

Post-Tribune staff writer

PORTAGE -- ArcelorMittal Burns Harbor will soon begin to recycle one of the waste types it applied to dispose of in a new landfill, a company official said.

In a landfill permit application to the state, the company listed blast furnace filter cake as a waste that it intends to landfill. But that's only in case it can't be recycled, Dale Heinz, senior division manager for primary operations at Burns Harbor, testified at a public hearing Wednesday on the proposed landfill.

"Including these ... raw materials within the permit application does not mean that we intend to dispose of them as wastes rather than utilize them as feedstocks" Heinz said. "Instead we have only included these feedstock materials to cover the possible scenario where they cannot be utilized in our operations due to shut-downs, maintenance outages or more stringent environmental regulations."

Heinz said the company recycles half of its daily production of blast furnace filter cake in its sinter plant and will soon be starting a new process to recycle all of it.

"This material is an extremely valuable feedstock for the sinter plant due to its high iron and carbon content. ArcelorMittal has invested millions of dollars of capital into a patented process that will allow for the recycling of 100 percent of the daily make of this material plus the material that we have been staging. Construction of this patented process is almost complete and operation is expected to begin very soon," he said.

Right now, the unrecycled portion is stockpiled "for future use" near the Port of Indiana. The company produces 60,000 tons of blast furnace filter cake per year and has 700,000 tons stacked up.

Heinz said the company tested air, soil, surface water and groundwater in the area where the material is stored and that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency agreed "that no significant contamination existed" as a result of the waste storage "and that no further action was necessary."

He said the company uses all of its daily production of basic oxygen furnace sludge in the sinter plant, but needs to dry and process the material in the northeast corner of the plant before being able to recycle it. He said EPA has concluded no significant contamination existed in that area as a result, either.

Kim Ferraro, attorney with the Legal Environmental Aid Foundation of Indiana in Valparaiso, pointed out that waste tests were taken by Bethlehem Steel in 1999 and that results for the northeast area were flawed. The 33-acre northeast area is also referred to as

"Easterly's pile" after Indiana Department of Environmental Management Commissioner Tom Easterly, who was in charge of environmental matters at Bethlehem from 1994 to 2000.

"There was no soil testing done because the entire area consists entirely of man-made fill," Ferraro said.

"We still need to understand what's going into the ground ... The groundwater flows north toward Lake Michigan. It's open dumped. It rains. What's stopping it from flowing into Lake Michigan?"

Ferraro said Bethlehem Steel held many of the waste samples so long that the lab analyzing them dismissed the results. She said other samples of waste were supposed to be taken at the northeast pile, but instead came from the part of the plant where the waste was generated. Ferraro said more questions remain to be answered.

"Not only is (the northeast pile) going into the landfill, but how is it impacting our beautiful National Lakeshore?" she said.

Heinz said ArcelorMittal has weighed other options for getting rid of the waste, including sale, off-site disposal and recycling, but that those options weren't feasible or were too energy-intensive.