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April 6, 1990: 104 hazardous dump sites found on Bethlehem Steel site

By Steve Cichon (https://buffalonews.com/author/sjcichon/) | Published April 6, 2015 | Updated September 7, 2016

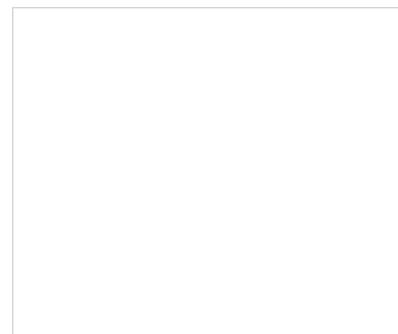
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As Western New York began to look at the post-Bethlehem Steel future of Lackawanna's waterfront, it was clear that the 2.5-square mile former plant site would have to be cleaned up.

The Bethlehem Steel Corporation was already on the hook for about \$30 million to clean up the parts of the site that housed the coke ovens, but an EPA investigation, released 25 years ago today, found 104 separate hazardous dump sites at the Route 5 complex.

"Bethlehem's problems just beginning" (http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/bethlehems-problems-just-beginning-epa-says-it-found-104-hazardous-waste-dumps-on-lackawanna-plant-site-19900406)

"The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said it has found 104 hazardous-waste dumps on the 2.5-square-mile plant site and is demanding that the steelmaker decide how it will clean or contain the dumps, which the EPA says pose serious health and environmental problems."



06 april 1990 bethlehems problems just beginning



(<https://s3.amazonaws.com/bncore/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/06-april-1990-bethlehems-problems-just-beginning.jpg>)

Payment of a \$1 million state environmental fine plus \$28.3 million to clean up its Lackawanna coke-oven operation may be only the beginning of Bethlehem Steel Corp.'s environmental problems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said it has found 104 hazardous-waste dumps on the 2.5-square-mile plant site and is demanding that the steelmaker decide how it will clean or contain the dumps, which the EPA says pose serious health and environmental problems.

Federal officials say the chemicals leaking from the dumps are fouling ground water, six creeks and Lake Erie. Some chemicals that are attached to windblown particles also pose air-pollution problems as they blow off the site and into populated areas of Buffalo and Lackawanna.

Conrad Simon, director of EPA's Air and Waste Management Division in New York, said he will visit Buffalo in the next month to discuss Bethlehem's pollution problems.

Federal officials issued an order in late February calling on the steelmaker to start work on a remedial investigation immediately. But Bethlehem, citing a series of objections, has requested a hearing on the order. No date has been set.

After months of negotiations, Simon said, he issued the order.

"It is clear that significant differences exist that will prevent us from obtaining a consent version of this order," he said. "Therefore I have decided to issue this order unilaterally for the protection of human health and the environment."

A Bethlehem spokesman said the company asked the EPA for a hearing because if it didn't respond in 30 days the order would take effect.

"We have some objections to the order we want to raise, and it's the only way to do it," the spokesman said.

The decade-long cleanup also could disrupt planned development of the Gateway Metroport, a redevelopment operation on the steel plant site, because the dump sites are scattered throughout the plant. State development officials say investors are cautious about any development on former toxic-waste sites. The purchasers of property also could become liable for cleanup costs. One environmental activist said plant contamination already has caused 135 "good companies" to bypass Metroport.

State Environmental Commissioner Thomas C. Jorling ordered a Bethlehem subsidiary, BethEnergy, to cut gaseous benzene emissions from its coke-oven operations by 95 percent by Aug. 1.

The company is already spending \$28.3 million to clean up coke-oven operations. Jorling ordered the company to accelerate the work, pay a \$1 million fine and shut one of the three offending coke-oven batteries.

Jorling agreed to suspend \$300,000 of the fine if BethEnergy shuts the battery by July 1. Commenting on the economic impact of the order, the commissioner said the early closing of the coke-oven batteries will cost \$3 million and the loss of 80 to 100 jobs.

Mayor Thomas Radich of Lackawanna praised Jorling's action Thursday as "a step in the right direction."

"We've been putting up with all this pollution for years, and I think the city should get a part of the fine. I will do everything I can to see that we get it," Radich said.

State Assemblyman Francis J. Pordum, D-Blasdell, commenting on the fine said:

"It's something that is needed; there were enough violations. BethEnergy is starting to clean up, but this shows the state is serious."



(<https://buffalonews.com/author/sjcichon/>) **Steve Cichon** – Steve Cichon, communications professional, pop culture historian, and publisher of BuffaloStories.com, tells the stories of Buffalo's past through The News' BN Chronicles. He is a local radio and TV veteran, historian and author of five books.

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