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Groups from 6 States Urge Safe Destruction Of Nerve Agent Wastes

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"DO IT RIGHT, KEEP IT ON SITE!" SAY GROUPS FROM SIX STATES,
URGING SAFE DESTRUCTION OF NERVE AGENT WASTES ON-SITE IN INDIANA INSTEAD OF DISCHARGE INTO THE
DELAWARE RIVER

"Army's proposal for shipping VX hydrolysate is going down the drain."

Boaters, union members, environmental justice activists, local elected officials and conservationists from six states came together today to denounce a U.S. Army plan to ship VX nerve agent hydrolysate - the hazardous liquid by-product of nerve agent neutralization - from Indiana to New Jersey, to be treated and discharged into the Delaware River. More than twenty organizations took place in press events today in Indianapolis and southern New Jersey to promote safe destruction of the VX hydrolysate in Indiana.

Newport, Indiana is home to one of eight chemical weapons stockpile sites, and the only site whose stockpile is comprised solely of bulk containers of VX nerve agent. This nerve agent is now being neutralized with water and a caustic solution, which results in hydrolysate. Until December 2002 the Army had planned to do follow-up treatment of this hydrolysate at Newport with a technology called Supercritical Water Oxidation (SCWO), which had been scrutinized for years and approved by the Army, citizen environmental groups and state regulators. Then, responding to terrorism fears after 9/11, the Army abruptly decided to instead ship the waste to an off-site commercial treatment facility, under the assumption that this plan would cost less and could be accomplished in less time. Since then, a multitude of citizens groups and other professional organizations and

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elected officials in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey have criticized the plan as unnecessary at best; a threat to the environment and chemical security at worst.

At the Indianapolis press event, Sara Morgan, a retired schoolteacher from Newport, Indiana made clear that Hoosiers have long been committed to treating the waste on-site. "I don't know about other places in the country, but in west central Indiana we care about being good neighbors. In this case our neighbors stretch all the way to New Jersey and we don't want this material dumped on them when it can be treated safely right here."

Groups along the proposed transportation route, which includes the states of Ohio and Pennsylvania, are concerned about the chances of a highway hydrolysate spill. These concerns have been heightened as chemical security issues - such as toxic spills on highways and railways, and hazardous cargo re-routing in east coast cities - are gaining more attention in local and national government. Tina Daly, with the Pennsylvania Environmental Network noted one difference between these situations and the VX hydrolysate issue: an easy solution. "Of all the thousands of trucks carrying hazardous waste on the highways every day, the solution to any risks posed by hydrolysate transportation doesn't involve choosing which communities to put at risk. Instead it is taking a precautionary approach and preventing transportation in the first place. It's an easy fix."

Others speaking in New Jersey emphasized their skepticism that DuPont could safely treat the waste. "DuPont has not proven to be a reliable handler of dangerous substances, as proven by the recent expose of their mishandling of PFOAs. We cannot place waste from deadly VX into such unreliable hands," said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper. Alan Muller, with Green Delaware, agreed. "DuPont has long been known as one of the world's worst environmental offenders. So it is hardly surprising that people on both sides of the Delaware River, in Delaware and New Jersey, have been determined from the beginning that VX nerve agent wastes will not be added to the toxic mix DuPont dumps into our river."

Union workers from both Indiana and New Jersey also supported on-site treatment of the VX hydrolysate in Indiana. In New Jersey, union workers say that DuPont's shoddy maintenance record should give us pause, even if a risk assessment shows that the treatment process might work. However in Indiana, union workers are confident in the SCWO process and want to benefit from the local jobs.

Boating groups such as the Pennsylvania Boating Association and the Delaware River Yacht Club are concerned that the discharge from DuPont will harm the Delaware River ecosystem and turn away people who use the river for recreation.

Elizabeth Crowe, spokesperson for the Chemical Weapons Working Group, headquartered in Kentucky, noted that the Army's original argument for transportation of the hydrolysate was that it would be cheaper and faster than using SCWO on-site, but that to date the Army has offered up no data proving its point. "When you consider the amount of taxpayer dollars spent on scientific reviews of off-site commercial treatment, transportation risk assessments, public relations, and additional storage of hydrolysate in Indiana, the alleged 'cost savings' are gone," Crowe said. "Meanwhile, the Army's own demonstration data for SCWO continue to show that this technology is a safe, viable choice for treatment of VX hydrolysate."

Before the Army sought a contract with DuPont to treat the hydrolysate, it tried to ship the waste to Dayton, Ohio for treatment at a PermaFix facility. Dayton resident Mary Johnson helped organize her community, which is on the fenceline of the PermaFix facility, to oppose the shipment. Johnson said the overwhelming opposition by Ohio communities and legislators should have been a clear message to the Army that transporting the waste was not the way to go. "But instead of going back to its original plan, as we suggested, the Army just tried to unload its burden on yet another community," she said. "The Army is continuing down a path of injustice and we're still here to help stop it."

Sharon Finlayson with the New Jersey Environmental Federation said New Jersey groups will continue to work with their elected officials and regulators to reject the nerve agent wastes and band together to protect

workers, communities and the Delaware River. " The discharging of poisons into our waterways continues to tell our society that it is okay to treat our lakes, streams, rivers and oceans as toxic sewers. This dangerous practice must be stopped."

Crowe summed up the feeling of the groups today by saying, "This VX waste transportation proposal is going down the drain. The Army should avoid any further erosion of its reputation in communities and among politicians by moving forward swiftly with on-site treatment in Indiana."