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Subject: USS Lead - Press

East Chicago press clips
US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs
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Chicago Post Tribune - EPA officials tour East Chicago, deny plans to close Chicago office

Northwest Indiana Times - Gov. Holcomb signs assistance for East Chicago into law

Chicago Post Tribune - 3 environmental activists sound off on future of the Calumet Region

Al Jazeera - US environment agency vows to fight lead contamination (video)

Water Online - In East Chicago, Corrosion Control Efforts May Make Lead Problem Worse

DNA Info - Closing Chicago EPA Office Would 'Devastate,' But Agency Denies Shutdown

http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-east-chicago-pruitt-visit-20170419-story.html
EPA officials tour East Chicago, deny plans to close Chicago office
Craig Lyons, Post-Tribune
Federal officials touring a lead-contaminated East Chicago neighborhood on Wednesday downplayed the Trump administration's proposed cuts to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and said there are no plans to close its Chicago regional office.
Robert Kaplan, Region 5's acting regional administrator, said he's been assured that the EPA's Chicago office would remain open after speaking with the federal agency's representatives in Washington, D.C., despite reports the local office could be consolidated in Kansas City, Mo.
"They reaffirmed there's no discussion about shutting the Chicago office," Kaplan said.
Kaplan's comments came at the end of EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's visit to East Chicago to discuss the ongoing clean up efforts at the U.S.S. Lead Superfund site. Pruitt, during his brief remarks, did not comment on any proposed cuts to the EPA but instead pledged his agency's support for East Chicago.
During Pruitt's visit, his first to a Superfund site since being appointed administrator, he toured the Calumet neighborhood, met with local, state and federal officials, and talked with residents and community members about how the lead and arsenic contamination has affected their lives.
"The reason I'm here is that it's important that we restore confidence to people here in this community that we're going to get it right," Pruitt said.
The EPA's objective is to come in and make sure people's health is protected, and that their land and health are secure in the long run, Pruitt said.
"We're committed to doing that," Pruitt said.
President Donald Trump's proposed federal budget includes "devastating" cuts to environmental programs across the country, said Nancy Loeb, director of Northwestern's Environmental Advocacy Clinic. Those proposed cuts could eliminate or drastically reduce funding to research programs, infrastructure programs, lead exposure prevention efforts and environmental enforcement at the federal level.

Loeb said she thinks the proposed cuts are intended to bring environmental protections to a halt.
"It will do it pretty successfully," Loeb said.
The cuts are hidden behind budget constraints and states' rights, Loeb said, but passing the EPA's duties to the states won't work. The EPA's proposed budget would cut grant programs to states, Loeb said, but would remove a level of oversight and enforcement from the federal agency.
"The resources aren't there," Loeb said.
Rep. Peter Visclosky, D-Merrillville, and Sen. Joe Donnelly, D-South Bend, said Trump's proposed federal budget must still go through congressional review before any cuts or changes are made within the EPA.
Visclosky said Congress' goal is to ensure agencies have appropriate funds to meet needs.
"I would not jump to conclusions," Visclosky said.
A budget process is a long process, Donnelly said, and changes get made to the proposed plan during Congress' review.
"The real budget will provide the funds necessary to make sure East Chicago is right," Donnelly said.
As the EPA began remediation work at homes in the Superfund site this week, the federal agency is still reviewing a request to provide water and water filters to East Chicago residents to minimize the affects of lead in their drinking water.
In March, a group of advocacy organizations, led by the Natural Resources Defense Council, petitioned the EPA to provide water filters and bottled water to residents throughout East Chicago.
Water testing done by the EPA at the Superfund site show elevated levels of contaminants in the drinking water. The agency found that 18 of the 43 homes where the water was tested exceeded 15 parts per billion of lead — the EPA's threshold for water safety.
The petition asked the EPA to provide residents with free faucet filters or bottled water; test the city's drinking water; expand blood lead level testing for children; and review corrosion control measures. The request would prioritize actions at the Superfund site before expanding throughout the whole city.
"We're working on that right now," Kaplan said.
As a part of Gov. Eric Holcomb's disaster declaration, Indiana Department of Environmental Management last week began distributing water filters and replacement cartridges to residents of the Superfund site.
"The most important thing is getting the water system right," Kaplan said.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/gov-holcomb-signs-assistance-for-east-chicago-into-law/article_f1f6d8ce-91f4-59d4-b1e3-87f8b2085b53.html

Gov. Holcomb signs assistance for East Chicago into law

- Lauren Cross Apr 20, 2017

INDIANAPOLIS — Gov. Eric Holcomb signed into law Thursday a plan to indefinitely continue portions of his emergency order providing state assistance to lead-contaminated areas of East Chicago.
House Enrolled Act 1344 designates city neighborhoods contaminated by past lead manufacturing operations as "areas of special concern," and directs state agencies to continue working in those areas with federal counterparts to relocate residents and remove or remediate soil tainted by lead or arsenic.
It also requires the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to annually test the city's water supply to confirm it complies with federal lead and copper limits for drinking water.
The new statute, which took effect immediately, was sponsored by state Reps. Earl Harris, Jr., D-East Chicago; and Mike Aylesworth, R-Hebron; and state Sens. Ed Charbonneau, R-Valparaiso; Lonnie Randolph, D-East Chicago; and Rick Niemeyer, R-Lowell.
It received unanimous support by both chambers of the General Assembly.
"I'm proud of the all-hands-on-deck approach we've seen among local, state and federal officials to provide support and assistance to East Chicago residents," Holcomb said. "I sign this bill without any hesitation and stand with our partners to continue efforts to meet the needs of these residents."
On Wednesday, Holcomb joined EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and several Northwest Indiana lawmakers on a visit to the USS Lead Superfund site in East Chicago.
Critics said Pruitt offered no concrete solutions to the ongoing lead crisis during his brief visit, and they dismissed promises of support from a federal administration that proposes to slash the EPA's budget.
Supporters, including Holcomb, said Pruitt's visit should reinstate confidence in the community.

http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-earth-day-faces-st-0421-20170420-story.html

3 environmental activists sound off on future of the Calumet Region

By: Meredith Colias, Amy Lavalley and Carrie Napoleon Post-Tribune

Thomas Frank

The East Chicago lead crisis and recent U.S. Steel hexavalent chromium spill near Lake Michigan have galvanized environmental activists who say Northwest Indiana must face the hazards directly linked to industry.

From community activism to heading non-profit preservation groups, each have taken a different path with the same goal in mind: often alerting residents to often invisible dangers while working to maintain a healthier landscape for future generations.

To mark Earth Day, the Post-Tribune spoke to three people who are involved in environmentalism to learn where they think their movement is headed and what work they believe still needs to be done to safeguard the Calumet Region's health and future.

The East Chicago lead crisis is just the latest environmental fight to gain artist Thomas Frank's attention.

As the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt met with officials at the former Carrie Gosch Elementary School this week in East Chicago. Dressed in a "Calumet Lives Matter" T-shirt, Frank helped lead protests outside the building.

Concerned about rumored cuts to the EPA, Frank said they were demanding a variety of concessions for residents, including guaranteed lifetime health care, voluntary buyouts for remaining West Calumet homeowners, speeding up a hydrology study and ensuring effective remediation for sites that have tested positive for lead.

About 30 residents still remain in Zone 1, organizers said.

"They were allowed to move people on top of a lead smelter for 40 years," he said. Residents "didn't cause this, yet they are being asked to carry the burden."

A Chicago native, Frank, 53, has been a longtime environmental activist in Northwest Indiana. He moved to East Chicago in 1997 with his wife Kristin, daughter of former East Chicago Roosevelt basketball coach John Todd. They have a daughter and son, aged 14 and 13.

He is the former director of the Indiana Harbor Shipping Canal and previously sat on the city's redevelopment commission. Frank was involved in anti-petcoke activism in Chicago, preservation efforts in Marktown and is also a former board member of the Calumet Heritage Partners and Association for the Wolf Lake Initiative.

Last year, Frank was arrested during protests outside of the BP refinery in Whiting. For a decade, Frank has also led "toxic tours" of Northwest Indiana.

For decades, the mindset behind residents cohabitating with industry has been, "well, you have to have jobs," he said. "We don't have to trade the health of the community for jobs. You can have both."

Natalie Johnson, Save the Dunes

Natalie Johnson decided when she was in fifth grade that she wanted to work in the outdoors.

Johnson, executive director of Save the Dunes, has spent her lifetime developing a connection with the environment.

"I was one of those young people who had their appreciation for the outdoors fostered at a very early age, so environmental work has been my only career," said Johnson, 31, who lives in Gary's Miller section and took over leadership of Save the Dunes three months ago.

Her love of the outdoors started with camp at age 5; the Illinois native went on to become a camp counselor before taking conservation jobs in Missouri. Johnson came to Northwest Indiana in 2011 through a federal program as an urban watershed ambassador, and her office was initially housed at Save the Dunes in Michigan City.

Save the Dunes, which is celebrating its 65th year, was formed to advocate for the creation of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

While the non-profit's mission now encompasses protecting and preserving all of the dunes, Lake Michigan and the region's environment overall, it's connection to the national park was never more apparent than last week when U.S. Steel released the carcinogen hexavalent chromium into Burns Waterway, forcing the closure of three beaches at the national lakeshore, as well as the beach and water intake at Ogden Dunes.

"Burns Waterway really is an example of why the community should be ever-vigilant about their environment," Johnson said. "Our role is, we want to educate the public about environmental concerns affecting the dunes and affecting Lake Michigan."

Save the Dunes plays a crucial role in environmental preservation, said Jim Sweeney, president of the Porter County chapter of the Izaak Walton League and co-founder of Dunes Action, which opposes plans for construction of a banquet center at Indiana Dunes State Park and selling liquor from the pavilion there.
"Save the Dunes is really, really important because they have full-time staff. Most of the rest of us in the conservation community are all volunteers," he said. "We look to Save the Dunes to take the lead on a lot of things."
For most of its history, the organization has been an advocate not only for the national lakeshore but also for Lake Michigan and its surrounding resources, Sweeney said, adding it was reassuring to see Save the Dunes come out with information immediately after the contamination of Burns Waterway.
"They came out with a strong piece pretty quickly. We look to Save the Dunes to fulfill that role as a full-time advocate for the park, the lake and the environment for the region," he said.
Carl Lisek, South Shore Clean Cities
For Carl Lisek, executive director of South Shore Clean Cities, his role as an environmental advocate evolved with the green movement itself.
He was the fourth employee with an environmental cleanup contractor around the time the U.S. EPA Superfund sites first were established in the mid-1980s after leaving a career in the hotel industry. The company worked in the mills and various industrial sites, removing underground storage tanks, handling cleanup of PCBs and lead contamination.
"I've worked at a lot of the Superfund sites in the area," Lisek said. He lived on a beeper and was away from home a lot, something he wanted to change as his two sons grew up.
"I wanted to do something different," he said. Lisek served on the Clean Cities board and attending a national meeting 15 years ago with his wife, Lorrie, the couple knew the program was something they wanted to bring back home to Indiana.
"We started with green before green was cool," Lisek said. The couple set up shop in the basement of their home and started writing grants with the Clean Cities goal of reducing dependence on foreign oil and helping with emissions reduction. As their success writing and administering grants grew, so did the business and the partnerships with local government units, schools and businesses.
Today South Shore Clean Cities is credited with attracting more than $75 million in grant funds to northern Indiana for its partners used for everything from the purchase of clean fuel vehicles to alternative fuel infrastructure. Lisek said every $1 in grant money SSCC has secured for the region translates into $40 worth of investment.
"Saying you can't have environmental concerns and industry work together is a fallacy," Lisek. Businesses have warmed to clean fuels, emissions reductions and cost-savings generated through the use of alternative fuel vehicles.
Lisek said his biggest disappointment is people think of him as "the electric car guy." He said the role SSCC plays in improving air quality and in turn the quality of life in the area is more than pushing people to electric vehicles.
"This is America. We are Americans. Americans want choice," Lisek said.
Cleaner diesel fuels and gasoline ethanol blends along with alternative fuels such as electric, propane and compressed natural gas provide cleaner options for people while keeping choices open, he said.
"Electric vehicles aren't for everybody," Lisek said.
http://www.aljazeera.com/video/news/2017/04/environment-agency-vows-fight-lead-contamination-170420095701827.html
US environment agency vows to fight lead contamination (video)
Al Jazeera's John Hendren
The head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, has vowed to save a city that's water supply is contaminated by lead.
Pruitt visited East Chicago in Indiana on Wednesday, where residents have been forced from their homes.
But environmental groups say Pruitt's visit is merely a show-stop, with the agency facing major budget cuts under President Donald Trump.

https://www.wateronline.com/doc/in-east-chicago-corrosion-control-efforts-may-make-lead-problem-worse-0001
In East Chicago, Corrosion Control Efforts May Make Lead Problem Worse
By Peak Johnson

East Chicago, IN, has been using a chemical, sodium hexametaphosphate, in order to control corrosion in lead pipes. However, some experts think it could be doing more harm than good.

Records obtained by the *Northwest Indiana Times*, show that the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) "approved the change in chemicals in May 2009, when it issued a permit for construction of the city's new water filtration plant."
However, sodium hexametaphosphate can actually increase lead release, according to Marc Edwards, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech. Edwards said that "using sodium hexametaphosphate might have been worse than conducting no corrosion control at all."
Edwards added that East Chicago's plan before taking on sodium hexametaphosphate was not very strong either.
Lead in drinking water can be deadly to most and can be especially harmful for children. Since last summer, "18 out of 431 children tested have been confirmed to have blood lead levels above the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 5 parts per million action level, according to data provided this month by the Indiana State Department of Health."
The *Northwest Indiana Times* added that "Up to 20 percent of children in zone 1 of the East Chicago USS Lead Superfund site, where the most heavily contaminated soil across three residential cleanup areas was found, had preliminary or confirmed elevated blood lead levels between 2005 and 2015."
Although having lead in water and then in soil is not related, residents who are introduced to both can still experience health risks.
For a time, educators in nearby Chicago struggled with new legislation that required both schools and daycare centers to test drinking water for lead contamination. Some held issues with the potential cost while others are challenging the overall value of the testing.
Earlier this year, the Illinois House of Representatives recently passed legislation requiring that lead testing take place in both schools and daycare centers.

Pilsen Clip
https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170418/near-west-side/closing-chicago-epa-office-would-devastate-but-agency-denies-shutdown

Closing Chicago EPA Office Would 'Devastate,' But Agency Denies Shutdown
Stephanie Lulay DNAinfo April 18, 2017

CHICAGO — Closing two of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 10 regional offices could have "devastating" effects on Chicago, officials said, but the EPA is denying reports that the office responsible for monitoring clean air and water in the Great Lakes region will go anywhere.
On Friday, *Politico* reported that federal budget cuts will likely hit the EPA hard, and the budget instructs the EPA to identify two regional offices for closure by June 15. On Saturday, *Sun-Times* columnist Michael Sneed quoted an unnamed city source saying the Chicago office could be consolidated with an EPA regional office in Kansas.

In response to reports, Mayor Rahm Emanuel said the administration's plan "would be harmful to the environment and public health in Chicago" and the entire Great Lake region, and "all of us living in our nation's heartland" should be outraged.
"The report that the federal government is planning to close the Region 5 office of the EPA should be concerning to us all. At a time when US Steel is carelessly spilling dangerous chemicals into Lake Michigan, we cannot turn our back on the Great Lakes and allow the Trump administration to muffle the EPA," Emanuel said. "Whether you believe in modern science and thus believe in climate change or not, the fact is the EPA exists to protect human health and the environment."
But in an e-mail to staff Monday afternoon, acting EPA regional administrator Robert Kaplan called the reports that Region 5 office in Chicago was closing "untrue" rumors and "pure speculation." The EPA is discussing ways to eliminate office space to save money, Kaplan said.
"At this time, our discussions have not veered into the subject of an office closure. Anyone stating anything to the contrary is spreading false information," he said.
EPA spokesman J.P Freire called the reports "a hoax."
"The alleged closure was just a hoax — there's no information whatsoever that supports these rumors," EPA spokesman J.P. Freire said.

Kaplan said the EPA remains committed to work in Region 5 communities, which include Flint, Mich. and those affected by the Superfund site in East Chicago, Ind. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, who was confirmed in February, is visiting the Superfund site this week, Kaplan said.

Consequences of cuts

While the fate of Region 5's office remains unknown, President Donald Trump's budget released in March does call for a 31 percent spending reduction to the EPA, slashing its budget by $2.6 billion.

Among other cuts, the budget would eliminate funding for the $300 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and cut funding for hazardous waste cleanup at Superfund sites by 30 percent.

Troy Hernandez, a member of the Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization, said the group has worked closely with Region 5's environmental justice program to ensure vital clean ups. The agency has been investigating lead contamination in Pilsen since 2011, when the EPA became involved with a cleanup at the former Loewenthal lead factory.

The EPA is already working with limited resources, and significant cuts in Chicago would likely prevent the agency from new testing in Pilsen, an industrious neighborhood that has been home to lead paint factories, brass smelters, coal plants and today, a metal shredder, Hernandez said.

"It is not an overstatement to say this neighborhood is very, very polluted. Without the EPA pushing for it, I don't know that we would get anything done," he said of the cleanups.

In 2013, the EPA found dangerously high levels of lead in an alley behind the H. Kramer smelting factory. The site was later cleaned up.

In November 2015, under an agreement with the EPA, BNSF Railway and H. Kramer began removing lead-contaminated soil from two areas in the Pilsen neighborhood — a railway spur and alley behind the H. Kramer foundry and an area near Benito Juarez Community Academy.

Frank Lagunas is an EPA chemist that works out Region 5's Chicago office. For the last five years, Lagunas has worked to ensure the water served on airplanes — airplanes across Region 5's six states — is safe for consumption. The EPA works to not only safeguard the environment, but also protect the public's health, he said.

Lagunas said a 31 percent cut to the EPA's budget — which reportedly means 1 of 5 EPA employees would be laid off — would devastate the already cash-strapped agency.

"There's the old saying, 'do more with less,' but that's not a real physical possibility," said Lagunas, a veteran and University Village resident. "You need technically experienced people to respond, and if those don't exist, you are waiting for it to get so bad that people start advocating for themselves that there's an issue here. And a lot of times, it's too late [at that point]."

With fewer employees and resources, the EPA won't be ready to respond to an environmental emergency like the Flint, Mich. water crisis, he said, where lives could be at stake.

"Making a little tiny change in the way you treat your water or address a remediation could have devastating consequences," Lagunas said.

Sincerely,

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