



John M. Cannon

Mayor

Efficiency & Excellence

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For Release to the Press

Re: Chemical Exposure at Little Calumet River

The City of Portage holds ArcelorMittal responsible for this week's chemical exposure; that resulted in excess amounts of fish mortality. While reports show many, including IDEM, knew of the concerns as early as August 12th, 2019, the City of Portage was not informed of this concern until August 15th, 2019. Mayor John Cannon went to the Portage Public Marina to look into the reported concerns. Mayor Cannon spoke with IDEM on site. Upon recent statements from ArcelorMittal, it was determined that the Little Calumet River (a tributary to Lake Michigan, at Portage, IN) was contaminated with Cyanide and Ammonia-Nitrogen levels in extreme excess, ultimately resulting in the death of hundreds of fish. Mayor Cannon holds Arcelor Mittal responsible for this event, and also parts blame to IDEM for not informing the City of Portage until several days after the first incident. The Mayor is calling for action to be taken. Further, the City of Portage will be taking aggressive action with the EPA to ensure the breakdown of communication, like this, does not occur again.

Working with IDEM, ArcelorMittal, EPA, and DNR, Mayor Cannon will be having conversations to work through how proper communication with such events is key to the safety of residents and wildlife. Going forward, the Mayor wants to see proper communication and plan for resolve given to local communities (i.e. Portage, Lake Station, Gary, Valparaiso, Porter, etc.) where the improper communication could prove detrimental to the city's local environment.

In a statement from IDEM, it was brought to attention that "ArcelorMittal experienced exceedances of the daily maximum limit for total cyanide and ammonia-nitrogen. These exceedances appear to be the cause or a significant contributing factor to the mortality of the fish observed on the East Arm of the Little Calumet River. IDEM has requested that the facility initiate a spill response along with increased monitoring of its outfalls to the Little Calumet River."

ArcelorMittal also stated on August 15th, 2019, "This week, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) observed dead fish near Burns Ditch, located at the southern end of the Burns Harbor facility. We responded immediately and are conducting ongoing sampling in the area. Preliminary sampling has indicated cyanide and ammonia exceedances of permitted limits. We are still investigating whether these constituents are a contributing factor and what the source of these exceedances might be. We will continue to work closely with the agencies involved and provide updates as appropriate."

Residents are asked to avoid the area while cleanup and mitigation efforts are on-going. Residents are also asked to withhold from eating any fish caught in the affected areas. Further updates will follow via social media outlets and the City of Portage website.