



## Dangerous chemical waste found in former Marshall foundry

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MARSHALL TOWNSHIP, Mich. (NEWSCHANNEL 3) - A bankruptcy in 2002 closed a Marshall Township company, now that eight years have passed, the mess that was left behind is just starting to be cleaned.

The Environmental Protection Agency has set up staff at the former foundry, located at 15304 15 Mile Road in Marshall Township, with trailers and a full staff dedicated to cleaning out dangerous chemicals that were left in the building, including heavy acids and bases that were in 400 containers in 50 drums, according to EPA spokesperson Mick Hans who spoke to Newschannel 3 from his offices in Chicago.

It's a cleanup that will be paid for by the federal government and not the company, since it went bankrupt and washed its hands of all the equipment, chemicals and the building in Marshall Township. There aren't many people living in the shadow of the Midwest Metallurgical plant, but Bryan Miller is one of them, and he's worried about the chemicals that have sat there literally for almost a decade.

"In driving by you can see it's turning into to quite the circus down there, I think there's a lot more going on down there than just a few barrels that we were initially told," said Miller.

Miller, a Marshall firefighter, says he raised the issue with the Marshall Township Board, and was told initially that the issue wasn't severe, but since the EPA arrived, he admits he's a little more worried.

"I'm really starting to get concerned what's in our water here," said Miller, who says he may bring up the issue again, especially since he lives so close to the plant, "It's getting concerning to the point where we'd like some answers, for what's going on, we'd like to stay here, we've got a newborn baby if that place goes, what's going to go."

The EPA says it's concerned about the chemicals, but on-scene coordinator Jeff Lippert says the situation isn't severe compared to similar situations he's worked, where literally hundreds of barrels are left behind by bankrupt companies. He also says that chemicals haven't leaked out.

"We were just fortunate that in the eight years nothing was released," said Lippert.

At the same time Lippert says the real concern was thieves breaking into the plant to scavenge for copper, and possibly disturbing the drums and containers, or worse sparking a fire.

"There had been some trespassing and some instances that caused some concern and the investigation by the county found the material that was left here," said Lippert.

One woman who knows the situation well is Calhoun County Treasurer Ann Rosenbaum who says she's already dealt with a similar situation in Battle Creek, has seen another one pop up in Albion, and has been dealing with the Marshall Township issue for some time.

"We've been very fortunate with the EPA they have been 'Johnny on the spot,' they came right in, they assessed and now they're cleaning up and I couldn't ask for more," said Rosenbaum.

What Rosenbaum normally asks for as treasurer are taxes, and she says the former plant owners that went bankrupt didn't pay \$300,000 in back taxes, on top of not cleaning the site.

"They're the ones who caused the contamination they should be cleaning it up, but because they're in bankruptcy they've shown they have no assets and no way of cleaning up," said Rosenbaum, who says in the past the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment would mount the cleaning effort, but now the state has no money, so it's left to the EPA.

Lippert says the cleaning began in early May and could last for weeks, he says EPA teams dressed in full hazardous material gear have been working to consolidate and remove the chemicals.

"There were some strong acids and some strong bases some pretty corrosive material left here and if left unchecked, it could be an impact to the environment," said Lippert.

Lippert says his team will work on anywhere from 30-to-40 cases like this per year, and it usually involves a bankrupt company leaving behind hazardous industrial waste.

"It's not something they're allowed to do, it's just something that unfortunately happens," said Lippert.

Lippert says the threat from the chemicals is being contained, but if someone had broken into the plant and spilled the chemicals, they definitely would have been dangerous.

"Given the nature of the corrosivity of the materials that were left here on site there could have been some chemical burns," said Lippert who also says a fire would have been a real problem. "Without a doubt there would have been a toxic smoke that would have been released and it would have been an emergency situation."

Despite the risks, the chemicals were undisturbed for eight years. As for holding someone accountable, with the company long gone and bankrupt, Lippert says there are few parties to blame.

"If there is a viable responsible party we pursue them for cost recovery when there's not it's unfortunately funded by the taxpayer," said Lippert.

Rosenbaum says it's a blow to different agencies in Calhoun County that could have used the tax money, but she knows this situation is going to be repeated.

"It's not the first time and I'm sure it won't be the last what I'm glad of is we've acted so pro-actively that the EPA was so good to clean it up for us, so that when we do get it we'll be able to know we have a clean site," said Rosenbaum who says she's not happy about the messes bankrupt parties leave behind, whether it's a homeowner or a business, "It was sold and re-sold and the person who got it last, sold all the equipment made all the profit and left all the trash for us."

EPA officials may have another situation just like Marshall Township on their hands, even before they finish the cleanup at Midwest Metallurgical. Albion's City Manager Mike Herman drove to the cleanup site to introduce himself to EPA officials and said Albion also has a plant that was a metal plating operation, left behind in Bankruptcy. He said there also is abandoned industrial waste, and that they would like the EPA to make an assessment. Herman says Albion has already taken precautions to make sure the materials don't leak into the water supply.

The DRNE issued the following statement regarding this story:

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment has a tremendous working relationship with Michigan's business community that has allowed us to partner together to ensure Michigan's environment is kept safe. Unfortunately, there are times when companies, either through bankruptcy or other means, simply cease operations and leave behind contamination that must be addressed in order to protect the public health of their communities. Michigan has had a successful brownfield & cleanup program in operation for a over two decades now to address those sites throughout Michigan that would otherwise remain contaminated and unsafe. That program has been funded by two bond proposals passed by Michigan voters, the 1988 Quality of Life bond and the 1998 Clean Michigan Initiative. Unfortunately, those bond funds have been entirely exhausted at this point and the program has no funding to take on further cleanup projects. For sites that pose an imminent threat to public health we will work with local law enforcement to eliminate potential hazards when possible. For sites that have longer term cleanup work required, we simply will be unable to perform that work until a new funding source is identified for the program.

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