

# EPA Conducting Cleanup At Abandoned Plant

## Pickens Plating Inc.

Albion, Michigan

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### Contact us

If you need more information about the emergency removal project at Pickens Plating or if you have questions or comments you can contact these EPA team members:

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 5 plans to spend up to \$1.04 million to clean up an abandoned zinc plating facility filled with an estimated 100,000 gallons of uncontrolled hazardous waste. Cleanup workers under contract to EPA should be done with the project at Pickens Plating, 1000 Industrial Blvd., around mid-December. Work began Oct. 12.

This June the city of Albion asked EPA's help to clean up the mess left behind when Pickens declared bankruptcy in June 2009. The property reverting to Calhoun County for unpaid taxes alerted local officials to a potential problem. County Treasurer Ann Rosenbaum, who in May had to deal with an abandoned foundry in Marshall Township containing corrosive material, suspected Pickens Plating also held dangerous substances and contacted EPA and Albion officials.

A June inspection revealed the Pickens site was a disaster waiting to happen with dozens of drums, containers and vats – many of them leaking or open to the air – holding toxic acids, metals and chemicals. EPA determined the site posed an “imminent and substantial threat” to public health and the environment and used its authority under federal law to mount a “time critical” cleanup operation.<sup>1</sup>

Among the dangerous materials found inside the Pickens building were  
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*An environmental worker dressed in a hazard-materials suit takes a sample from a barrel in the abandoned Pickens Plating facility in Albion, Mich. Dozens of drums, vats and containers holding toxic materials were found in the former zinc electroplating plant.*

<sup>1</sup>The response action at Pickens Plating is being conducted in accordance to Section 104(a)(1) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA known as the Superfund law), and Section 300.415(b)(2) of the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP). You can view these laws and regulations at [www.epa.gov/lawsregs/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/lawsregs/index.html).

a 55-gallon drum containing chromium at concentrations 1,000 times higher than levels considered toxic to humans, hydrofluoric and nitric acids with hazardous pH levels and plating chemicals sitting in 41 open vats.

The building floors were also in poor condition showing signs of numerous spills, staining and waste accumulation from years of poor housekeeping. Inspectors found several holes in the roof that could allow precipitation to either corrode drums and cause leaking or react with open acid vats and release dangerous fumes.

The Pickens site was unsecured and the building, while locked, was found to be vulnerable to trespassing and vandalism that could release hazardous materials. Officials worried that vagrants setting fires in the building during the cold months could cause an explosion.

### **Cleanup actions**

Cleanup workers will first be identifying, consolidating and repackaging hazardous materials on-site. The consolidated materials will then be removed and disposed of at an approved off-site location.

Additional site activities will include adding security and setting up air monitoring both inside the Pickens building and around the site perimeter. There will also be building decontamination and dismantling of some structures as needed to help the cleanup work progress.

### **Next steps**

An EPA enforcement specialist is looking into cost recovery for the cleanup, and if there is no viable responsible party, Superfund will pay for the work.

After the time-critical removal action is completed later this year, the site will be referred to Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment for



*A leaky roof on the Pickens Plating building could allow rain to reach open acid vats and cause a chemical reaction that would release dangerous fumes.*



any long-term cleanup or pollution management that may or may not be needed.

### **Site background**

The 4-acre Pickens property includes one main building with multiple additions. The area is bordered by industrial properties to the south and west, wooded and open land to the north, agricultural land to the east and residential properties to the northeast.

Pickens Plating was founded in 1963 and specialized in zinc electroplating, mostly for the automotive industry. At its peak Pickens employed 13 people. The company closed in 2009. Title to the property reverted to Calhoun County this March in lieu of back taxes.