

River intakes to stay open

Written by James Bruggers The Courier-Journal
Jan. 15, 2014 |

courier-journal.com



Work continues around a storage tank with the chemical designation MCHM, 4-methylcyclohexane methanol, the chemical that leaked into the Elk River, at Freedom Industries storage facility in Charleston, W.Va., Monday, Jan. 13, 2014. (AP Photo/Steve Helber)

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Work continues around a storage tank with the chemical designation MCHM, 4-methylcyclohexane methanol, the chemical that leaked into the Elk River, at Freedom Industries storage facility in Charleston, W.Va., Monday, Jan. 13, 2014. (AP Photo/Steve Helber) / AP

Louisville Water Co. officials don't plan to close the utility's water intakes as a chemical spill from West Virginia passes by on the Ohio River, even as cities upstream such as Cincinnati take steps to close off their water supplies, officials said.

The chemical will be sufficiently diluted when it reaches Louisville on Friday that the company can safely treat the chemical, said spokeswoman Kelley Dearing Smith.

"It is not a health concern," she said, only "a taste and odor issue that we can handle."

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The water company's filtration systems at its Payne Plant and Crescent Hill plant can remove any taste or odor left behind by the chemical, she said.

Other officials have said if they could [smell](#)

[the chemical](#) in their water, they would not drink it.

So far, no taste or odor issues have been reported at the tap in any Kentucky communities farther up the Ohio River, said Dick Brown, spokesman for the Energy and Environment Cabinet.

The [Cincinnati Enquirer reported](#) Monday that Mayor John Cranley announced plans to close the city's river intakes.

It was expected to take about 20 hours for the spill to pass through the 15 to 20 river miles in that area, and two intake valves — located on the Kentucky side of the river across from California, Ohio — will remain closed at least twice that long as a precaution.

Brown said the Northern Kentucky Water District was also making plans to shut down its Ohio River intakes as a precaution but had not made a decision.

The Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission expected the leading edge of the 60-mile-long plume to show up at Meldahl Locks and Dam between Maysville, Ky., and Cincinnati on Tuesday.

“We will get a good characterization, length and concentration of the plume as it goes by Meldahl, over the next 24 to 48 hours, or however long it takes, said Jerry Schulte, manager of source water [protection](#)

[and emergency response](#) for ORSANCO.

There were reports of the chemical’s licorice smell on the water in Maysville.

State crews working with ORSANCO are on boats taking hourly samples, and concentrations of the chemical are dropping with dilution, Brown said after a morning briefing with emergency response officials.

“It is not believed it is going to be a public health issue,” he said.

The chemical, stored by Freedom Industries and used for washing coal, [spilled catastrophically](#) Thursday in Charleston, W.Va., along the Elk River, resulting in a state of emergency and an ongoing ban on any water use except for toilet flushing for at least 300,000 West Virginians.

It is called MCHM, or 4-methylcyclohexane methanol, and authorities have acknowledged they know little about its toxicity.

Brown said the chemical is used in Kentucky. But he said coal [companies](#)

[do not store it in large tanks in Kentucky](#), such as those that leaked from Freedom Industries, a supplier of the product.

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