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Tidings

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HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON

We wish you all a Happy and Healthy holiday season and a Prosperous New Year. 2022 will be Friends of Perdido Bay's thirty- fifth year of existence. We have worked very hard to clean up our beautiful bay with little success. But we know one thing, to allow this terrible pollution to continue without saying anything, would be a crime. There used to be a saying "If you see something, say something". We did and we want to thank all our members for sticking with our group in spite of our lack of success. Your support has made a difference. We would not be here if it weren't for you. The environmental agencies and our government have done little to support our bay. When we needed testing to demonstrate the damage to our bay, all we got was "There are no funds". But private citizens (you) have banded together to pay for those needed tests, in spite of our government. You should be proud. So we will continue to do testing and reporting on those tests. Maybe one day we will have success.



OUR ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCIES ARE A SHAM

I hate to say it, but our environmental agencies are a sham. If you think our environmental agencies are protecting your health and well being, you are wrong. I sometimes think the only reason politicians allow these agencies to exist is to fool the people into believing our government is protecting your health and well being; is protecting your environment. It is not. Of course, if we don't run tests and documented how bad our environment is, politicians can always play dumb. They didn't know it was that bad. We send all our elected officials our newsletters. They must be aware that International Paper is releasing solids which contain dangerous levels of dioxins and furans, heavy metals, and

PCB's. These chemicals do not disappear, but remain in the environment. During hurricanes and storms, these chemicals wash onto our property and contaminate our properties. It doesn't matter to the elected officials. Their election to office depends on money which comes from big polluters. When will it stop?

The polluters have been able to manipulate the rules and laws which have weakened the enforcement of environmental agencies. The dioxins which International Paper releases are not specifically prohibited by law. The only dioxin which has a limit is the 2,3,7,8 TCDD, which IP no longer discharges. All the other dioxin types have no limits. Many of the metals limits, are for whole effluent. Most of the metals are found in the solid portion of the effluent, but the solid portion is sufficiently diluted by the aqueous portion so that the limits are never exceeded. Another ploy which the paper industry uses to release excessive amounts of metals is to have the limits depend on the pH of the effluent. The paper industry has a very alkaline discharge. According to the rules, the more alkaline the effluent, the more metals can be released. The reasoning was - the more alkaline the effluent, the less toxic these metals become. This is true for most metals, but if you release them into an environment which is acidic (like Perdido Bay), these metals become more toxic.

Another ploy, which even our own consultants used, is to express the level of metals in the sediments in relation to aluminum. Aluminum is the most abundant metal in soils and sediments. It is especially high in Perdido Bay sediments because IP uses a salt of aluminum to help their solids settle. It is called alum. Not all the alum gets captured in the settling ponds and is released to Perdido Bay. It ends up in the sediments; so while arsenic may be high, so is aluminum. Dr. Livingston, who studied the bay from 1988 to 2007, used this comparison between aluminum and heavy metals, to mask the high level of heavy metals in the sediments of Perdido Bay.

And what about the amount of solids which IP is allowed to release. It is a huge amount and is legal. IP is allowed to release between 8,000 pounds to 16,000 pounds (dry weight) of total suspended solids per day, into the environment. Most of these solids end up in our bay. This amount is allowed by the rules and, as mentioned above, contains heavy metals, dioxins and PCB's. IP's environmental director testified in the last legal proceeding (Consent Order challenge) that she didn't know what was in those solids. Can you imagine dumping this amount of material and not knowing what was in it? I imagine that there is also quite a bit of calcium carbonate, as this is a byproduct of papermaking. This helps to keep the effluent alkaline. In the older paper mills in the U.S., the amount of total suspended solids allowed to be discharged depends on the production at the mill which is currently 2,500 tons per day of fiber. When IP got out of Elevenmile Creek and went to a wetland discharge, they were allowed to increase production and also increase the amount of total suspended solids. Again it was a ruse. The environmental agencies knew it was going to harm Perdido Bay, but promoted the increase anyway.

A LEGACY OF DESTRUCTION

There have not been any new papermills built in the U.S. since the late 1970's. The papermill in Cantonment Florida was built in 1942. The paper industry which is in cahoots

with the chemical industry (remember all the chemicals which paper mills use) has decided to continue to revamp their old mills instead of building new ones. New paper mills would be required to meet much more stringent standards which the paper industry simply does not want to do. So instead of building new more modern facilities (and less polluting), paper companies are simply fixing up these old mills and relegating the communities surrounding them to superfund status. Even though these old mills often can not get permits for their operation (such as the current case with IP), the government continues to allow these mills to operate, no problem. The end result is a legacy of destruction in the communities where these mills operate.

IP can not get permits to operate in Perdido Bay. IP's permit was supposed to expire in 2015, but because they made a timely application for a new permit, the old permit is just extended until the DEP either approves or denies a new permit (this is the rule). The Florida DEP is doing neither and just allowing IP to operate. The recent skirmish with IP over the Consent Order which was issued in 2019, was a preview of how IP intends to try and get a new permit. It looks like IP is going to direct their entire flow back into Elevenmile Creek, albeit further down. They think that they can get variances and mixing zones for the water quality standards which they can not meet because they will no longer be the sole source of water for the creek like they were for the headwaters. This certainly does not sound good for Perdido Bay. What we have going for us are the studies which show Perdido Bay is getting worse. It would be pretty hard for IP to get a permit with us being able to show that they are discharging dioxins and furans to the bay. The end result is: we are at an impasse with IP

A FAILED REGULATORY APPROACH

When the Clean Water Act was passed in 1973, lawmakers were, I am sure, hopeful that with guidance from the government, industries would upgrade their pollution systems and eventually cease discharging to water bodies. There was a system of permits with limits instituted to guide the industries toward eliminating their discharges. The national permit which was issued to polluters was called the NPDES - National Pollution Discharge Elimination System. All industries were supposed to cease discharging to waterbodies by 1983. That was nearly 40 years ago! What happened?

What ensued after the Clean Water Act passed was a massive effort by industry to undermine the Clean Water Act. Industry put out their PR: it wasn't only industry which was polluting waterbodies, but also other entities - local governments, septic tanks, agriculture, etc. Much of this was true. So environmental agencies instituted requirements that local governments and utilities get NPDES permits as well as industries. This increased the work load for the environmental agencies at a time when agency budgets were getting cut. Remember the "tea party"? So environmental agencies had larger mandates than they had budgets.

Combined with this, manufactures began moving their operations to other countries citing less regulatory requirements. Of course, the new plants which they were building overseas were new and more efficient than the mills in the U.S. The big thing though was cheaper labor. I remember seeing new Chevrolet plants in Uzbekistan. We were told that Chevrolet agreed to move there if Uzbekistan would only allow Chevrolets to be sold in their country. All other cars had to pay very high tariffs.

Jobs moving overseas put a lot of pressure on U.S. politicians. Environmental agencies continued to get their budgets cut. Industry lobbyists began gaming the system of standards. Instead of requiring a “healthy and well balanced system of fish and wildlife”, certain water quality standards were chosen as the criteria to meet. No matter that just meeting those water quality standards was not going to mean a “healthy and well-balanced system of fish and wildlife”. It was water quality standards which were important and meeting those standards meant the environment was “healthy” even though it wasn’t. Many water bodies have been taken off the “impaired” lists because they met the chosen water quality standards. Most of these water bodies are still impaired for biology but no one is checking the biology anymore.

So here we have little old Perdido Bay caught in this regulatory mess. It is a beautiful bay which today would certainly not be chosen as a discharge site by any paper mill in their right mind. But we still have a huge mill dumping dioxin and heavy-metal laden sludges into our bay. These will not disappear. These chemicals cause cancer and a host of other ailments. During hurricanes and other storms, these sludges are washed onto our beaches which expose us to harm. The effluent, which is toxic to larval forms of life, has managed to kill off all the clams and mussels which we used to see. So what are we going to do? The environmental agencies are not going to shut them down and neither are our politicians.

GIVE IP A GRANT TO CLEAN UP

This is what Friends of Perdido Bay proposed to our local state lawmakers at the meeting of the public with local state lawmakers. Maybe a “closed loop”? The technology exists. All other local entities were there with their requests for funding. We don’t know how much the grant would be, but maybe this direct grant to clean up would be a better method than fighting the regulatory wars. Certainly in the end, this direct grant method might be cheaper than fighting IP continuously over the years. We are hopeful that IP agrees to cooperate. If the community gives the industry money to not turn our community into another superfund site, why wouldn’t the industry cooperate? It is a little like extortion, but maybe with a better outcome. We can only hope.

This is something to ponder while enjoying your Christmas dinner. See you in 2022!

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