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## City & Region



### **Lackawanna officials criticize DEC plan to shift – not remove – Bethlehem Steel-era waste from site** **DEC's Bethlehem plan is waste shift, not removal**

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The toxic remnants of the Bethlehem Steel Co. coke plant and other facilities will be dug up and buried in another part of the Lackawanna site, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

That's not sitting well with City of Lackawanna officials, who envision a Buffalo-like waterfront renaissance for the Steel City.

In all, about 8,600 cubic yards of contaminated soil and fill – enough to fill three Olympic-size swimming pools – will be moved and buried at a designated site less than a field goal's kick from Smokes Creek and only about 1,500 feet from the shores of Lake Erie.

The soil contains chemicals or elements such as ammonia, arsenic, benzene, lead and other semi-volatile organic compounds.

Tecumseh Redevelopment, a subsidiary of ArcelorMittal USA, acquired title to the land in the early 2000s following the bankruptcy of Bethlehem Steel. The firm, which is under consent orders to remediate the site, seeks to contain contaminated materials on-site.

"I want a clean steel plant; they want the bare minimum," Lackawanna Mayor Geoffrey M. Szymanski said of Tecumseh.

City officials are looking at "big picture" at Bethlehem – the footprint of which includes nearly one-third of the city's land area and all of its waterfront, Szymanski said.

The future shouldn't include keeping hazardous chemicals on the property, he said.

"It's really restricting our ability to become a better city," Szymanski said.

Tecumseh officials did not respond to several requests for comment Monday.

The DEC said that substantial protections – including a specialized containment system that's backfilled and constantly monitored – are in place to keep the contamination permanently locked away from the environment and potential exposure to humans or animals.

The contaminants are now exposed to the environment primarily along the west bank of the Lackawanna Ship Canal and along Lake Erie just east of the Steel Winds wind turbine farm. The DEC's plan calls for them to be "stabilized, removed and consolidated" in an acid tar pit containment cell to the south of Smokes Creek on the other side of the former steel plant's property.

Those toxic spots were contaminated during the production of coke and steel at the site and, to this day, remain open to the environment.

The plan addresses three of the 44 contaminated areas at the Tecumseh site.

"These three units do not currently have any controls in place to isolate the waste material from the environment," according to the DEC's report, which was released last week. "The (solid waste) unit material has high concentrations of hazardous constituents, is directly exposed and has the potential to leach those contaminants to the groundwater, so we want to isolate this material from the environment."

The waste from the three sites is expected to be moved and consolidated at the acid tar pit location by the end of November, according to the DEC.

That proposed containment cell already contains a pair of open tar pits with about 100,000 cubic yards of waste byproducts – enough to fill more than 30 Olympic-size swimming pools – from coke and steel production at the site from the 1950s to 1970s.

The mix of iron dust, lime and other high-benzene content wastes includes naphthalene, arsenic, lead, pyrene, highly acidic materials and other chemicals.

It's up to 40 feet deep in spots.

The DEC said its plan "will not substantially limit possible clean-up options for the remainder of the site."

Other options, according to the DEC, included leaving the contamination in place and capping each of the 44 areas in their own spots or excavating the material and shipping the toxic waste off-site for disposal.

The cleanup itself is a good idea, according to Richard E. Stanton, an environmental attorney retained by the City of Lackawanna.

But, the city wants the waste removed.

"The removal of the hazardous waste from the lands closer to Route 5 is encouraging because it's cutting off routes of exposure to human beings and the environment in an area that are more immediately accessible and possibly developable," Stanton said.

"But it causes concerns because it's moving waste from one part of the site to another, where it will need to be contained forever."

"It will cost the public future access to the waterfront and future access to land without spelling out commensurate, offsetting public benefits," Stanton said. "It takes up 7 or 8 acres of the site for being a landfill forever."

It's why Stanton said a "global approach" to the site is needed before dealing piecemeal with the nearly four dozen areas of contaminated land on the site.

"They used the land for steelmaking from 1910 to 1983," he said. "But it's holding back a portion of the lands forever from the public."

Szymanski sees the former Bethlehem site – with its two miles of lakefront property and some of the most scenic views of Lake Erie – as a place that can revitalize the city.

"This place has so much opportunity, it's unbelievable," Szymanski said.

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