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GROUP DEMANDS BASIC ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS FOR UNPRECEDENTED FRACKING WASTE TRANSFER STATION ON THE OHIO RIVER

Meigs Citizens Action Now (Meigs CAN), a Southeastern Ohio grassroots community group, is waiting for a response from the United States Coast Guard regarding a demand letter calling for an environmental impact study (EIS) of Texas-based GreenHunter Water LLC's proposed transfer station. If approved, the facility would transport produced water and flowback from fracking sites through the Ohio River by barge for bulk disposal.

"This type of activity is unprecedented," said Elisa Young, founder of Meigs CAN, "Both in terms of the volume and the content of the waste involved. This would be the first facility of its kind in the country. Each barge could carry up to 4.5 million gallons of fracking waste. There has been no limit set. The waste is known to contain diesel fuel, chemicals classified as hazardous waste, carcinogens, and radiation levels 300 times higher than the Nuclear Regulatory Commission allows for industrial releases. Evaluating the impacts to public health and safety from hauling this through our drinking water must be done in a sound, scientific way."

GreenHunter Water, LLC of Grapevine, Texas, leased riverfront property in New Matamoras, Ohio, last year with the intent of setting up interstate waste transfer operations. The site includes a cluster of tanks originally installed for oil storage. They could hold 70,000 barrels (or 2.8 million gallons) of waste at a time. The 10-acre site has changed ownership multiple times since Mobil originally constructed it in the 1960's. The current owner, Pennsylvania's Weavertown Environmental Group, specializes in industrial accident response, and has applied to open a solid waste transfer facility on the same site.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, who was granted jurisdiction over GreenHunter's unprecedented facility, announced that no permits would be required to approve the terminal. Meigs CAN disputes this decision, and believes the United States Coast Guard must conduct a thorough evaluation of the potential impacts and impose appropriate regulatory safeguards before allowing this activity to proceed.

“The only public notice regarding this facility was an industry press release stating that GreenHunter Water had commenced operations last July. When it came to our attention, I called to ask why there had been no public notice and was informed that no permits had been issued, and that they were still in the process of determining which regulatory agency would have jurisdiction over GreenHunter’s operation.”

The ODNR ultimately was granted jurisdiction of the facility, and rendered the decision that no permits would be required for “temporary” storage or transfer of the fracking waste. ODNR staff geologists do issue permits for high volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing and injection wells for waste disposal, but they have no training or qualifications to determine whether air or NPDES permits are necessary to protect public health, safety, or the surrounding environment. With no similar facilities in existence, it is impossible for them to base the decision to waive permits on emissions, routine or accidental release estimates from similar facilities.

“People in Southeastern Ohio are acutely aware of what an unregulated, undisclosed chemical can do to their drinking water here on the Ohio River,” said Young. “We became part of the largest human health study ever undertaken in the United States after a huge cattle die-off caused by Dupont’s release of C8 (used to make Teflon) into our environment. When the U.S. EPA stepped in, we learned C8 was present in our private and public drinking water supplies at greater levels than Dupont previously claimed was safe for their own employees. What happens when an entire slew of undisclosed chemicals shrouded in proprietary secrecy is released into our drinking water, like the D&L injection well operators dumping into the Mahoning River? The only way to verify the potential impacts of GreenHunter’s proposed facility is for the Coast Guard to complete an EIS.”

Requests for transparency and opportunities for public participation have been denied by the Coast Guard to date. Requests to identify the criteria for setting the Texas limited liability corporation’s bond for damages, disclosure of chemicals, and basic first responder training in the event of routine or accidental releases also remain unanswered.

“A lot of the overall project is being kept secret,” said Terry Lodge, Toledo attorney for Meigs CAN. “We want the Coast Guard to explain where all the garbage from this gigantic scheme will go and let the public decide if Ohio will be left with the liability in the event of unplanned releases or accidents. The public must be able to understand the dangers to human health and the environment that thousands of transport truck tankers carrying millions of gallons of radioactive and carcinogenic waste might create. Questions of ultimate disposal and the apparent indifference toward environmental enforcement laws lead us to believe that this is yet another ‘fast one’ the captured regulatory agencies are putting over on the public for the benefit of corporate profit.”

The group will be lining up additional public support for the environmental impact statement in the coming weeks.