

News

The Honest Get the Axe

“Dow has dumped dioxin, a highly toxic and persistent chemical, into Michigan rivers for nearly a century.”



Mary Gade was forced to quit as head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Midwest office, based in Chicago.

Though EPA administrators usually have authority to enforce environmental laws, EPA administrator Stephen Johnson stripped Gade of her regional administrator powers saying “quit or be fired”.

Dow has dumped dioxin, a highly toxic and persistent chemical, into Michigan rivers for nearly a century. Levels of dioxin were 65 times higher than Michigan standards and 6 times higher than the level that mandates federal cleanup.

Gade had been negotiating plans to clean up the contaminated soil and sediment in the area.

The controversy stems from the fact that Dow provides local residents with jobs, jobs where their families live and children play in soil near signs warning them to keep off the river banks and avoid eating fish from the river. A catch 22, in essence.

Gade summarily invoked her emergency powers to order Dow to remove three hotspots of dioxin contamination, and that gave her a set of walking papers.

Whether there is a way that jobs can be retained through safer practices and

ongoing production does not seem to be the primary concern. The administration has exerted its belief that the economy must come before citizen's health and well being without concern for the fact that sick workers cannot contribute to the economy.

The administration did not opt to seek win-win solutions. Gade was simply fired for doing the right thing... for protecting the environment, and in turn, our children.

Dioxin is very highly toxic, a byproduct of the herbicide Agent Orange. Before 1970, Dow knew that dioxin could make people sick with cancer, damage the reproductive system, and cause death.

Dow was forced to cease the release of dioxin into in the mid-1980s, yet dioxin continued to increase. Dow argued that dioxin was not dangerous and at worst would cause a skin rash.

After Dow financed its own study, which was never peer reviewed, it was used to loosely assert that dioxin in soil and sediment has little to do with levels found in people.

Gade felt a responsibility to make sure people are living in a healthy and safe environment and states, “it's unconscionable that action hasn't been taken.”

And it's more unconscionable that Dow does not care.