



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

# EPA Seeking Your Opinion About Polluted Site

## Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc Site

LaSalle, Illinois

December 2004

### Talk to us

If you are interested in the site, we would like to talk with you. To set up an appointment, please contact:

#### Yolanda Bouchee

EPA Community Involvement  
Coordinator  
77 W. Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, Ill.  
(312) 353-3209  
bouchee.yolanda@epa.gov

### Site-related documents may be reviewed at:

**EPA Region 5 Records Center**  
77 W. Jackson Blvd., 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago

**LaSalle Public Library**  
305 Marquette St.

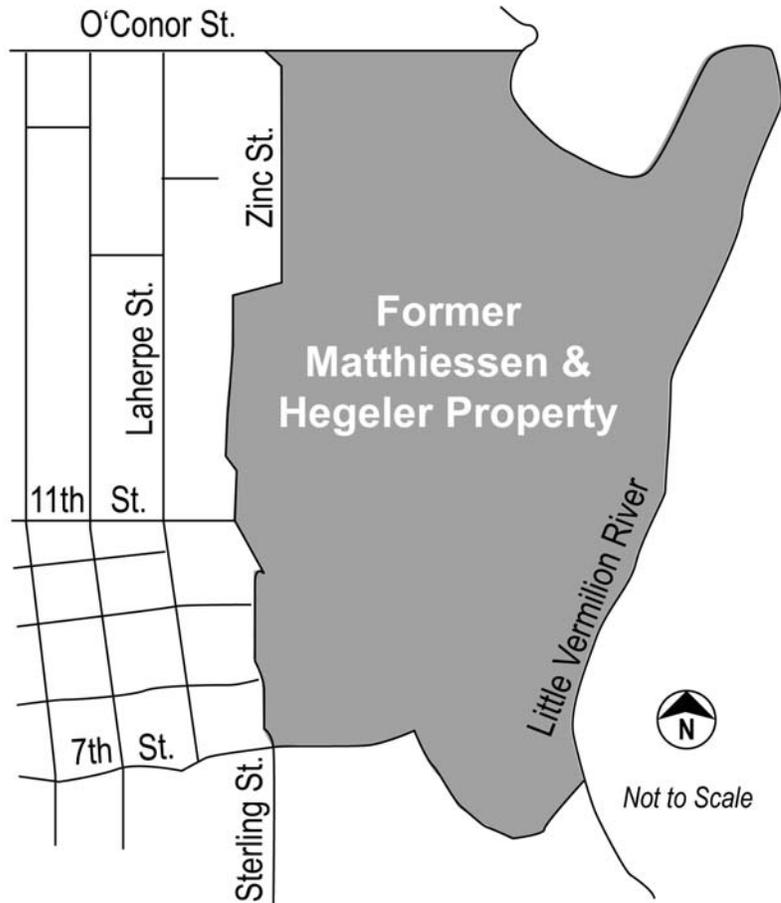
### On the Web:

<http://www.epa.gov>  
<http://www.epa.gov/region5>

To learn more about concerns and issues regarding the Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc site, EPA is seeking your views about the subject. If you are interested in the site we would like to talk with you. Please contact EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Yolanda Bouchee to set up an appointment.

In an effort to start collecting information about the site, EPA spent two days in LaSalle speaking to residents and local officials. During these community interviews, EPA asked residents and city and county officials about issues related to the site's contamination and cleanup, the community involvement process, and how the community involvement process could be improved.

The meetings indicated varying levels of knowledge about the site and former operations. The residents with whom we spoke have lived in the area from one and a half to 48 years. Residents who have lived there the longest naturally had the highest level of awareness about the site. In fact, several



Location map: Matthiessen & Hegeler Zinc

of them remember when the site was operating. However, even the long-time residents and local officials indicated that the site has received minimal coverage in the local media and also indicated a relatively low interest in the situation. None of the residents had contacted government officials about the site, and likewise none of the officials have heard from local residents about the issue.

The level of interest in the area varied. While all interviewees want to be kept on the mailing list, less than half of them indicated an interest in attending meetings. If meetings are held, however, City Hall and the local library were picked out as the best locations for such events. In advance of meetings, announcements should be advertised in the *LaSalle News Tribune* and possibly the local section of the *Peoria Journal Star*. Residents said radio announcements should air on *WLPO* particularly during the morning hours.

## Background

The Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc site is a 160-acre inactive zinc smelting and rolling facility that operated from about 1858 to 1978. The site is located on the east side of LaSalle and is bordered by the Little Vermilion River on the east, with residential properties surrounding the remainder of the area. The site is enclosed by a chain-link fence. The southern portion of the property contains an active specialty chemicals firm, Carus Chemical, and the now-closed LaSalle Rolling Mills plant. The former smelting and rolling processes produced pollution that remains on the site. Environmental concerns include a 6-acre slag waste pile containing metals such as cadmium, copper, chromium, lead, nickel and zinc. Runoff from the piles washes directly into the river, and sediment samples from the river bottom indicate elevated levels of these metals.

## Site history

M&H Zinc began operations in 1858 and stopped in 1978 after declaring bankruptcy. During the 120 years of the company's existence it produced slab zinc, sulfuric acid and ammonium sulfate fertilizer. These processes resulted in the release of airborne particles containing cadmium, lead, zinc and other chemicals. Additional manufacturing operations occurred in conjunction with the smelting process. A gas plant was operated on the site in the early years to manufacture fuel for the Hegeler furnace. Coal was mined on the site until 1937. During the 1950s, the company produced ammonium sulfate fertilizer. In 1961, the company stopped smelting zinc.

The manufacture of sulfuric acid was discontinued in 1968, and from 1968 until closing in 1978 the facility only did rolling operations.

After the bankruptcy, the Matthiessen and Hegeler property was sold at auction in 1979.

In 1993, Illinois EPA collected sediment (mud) and soil samples from the Little Vermilion River and the site. This was done for a preliminary evaluation of possible effects of past Matthiessen and Hegeler operations and in preparation for scoring the site for inclusion on the National Priorities List of EPA Superfund sites. These samples were much higher in metal concentrations than background samples collected in areas not affected by past operations of the facility. Zinc was elevated significantly in all samples, and cadmium and lead were greatly elevated in all but one sample. Other metals were also found at high levels. On-site samples also showed low levels of a variety of other contaminants including pesticides, PCBs, solvents and chemicals found in oil and coal.

The site is private property and surrounded by a fence, and residents are strongly urged against trespassing due to the chemicals and physical hazards found on the property.

Illinois EPA held a public meeting in LaSalle to discuss sample results in 1995.

The off-site soil samples collected by Illinois EPA in 1993 showed elevated levels of metals. Illinois EPA at that time determined that concentrations found did not pose a health risk from short-term exposure but that more information needed to be gathered to determine if there may be a

### What is the NPL?

The National Priorities List or NPL is a record of polluted sites that have had known releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants. The NPL guides EPA in determining which sites warrant further investigation and may be eligible for Superfund cleanup money. Identified sites are ranked using a "hazard ranking system," and those that score the highest are placed on the NPL. In June 2001 the M&H site was proposed for the NPL by EPA and Illinois EPA. Following the proposal, a public comment period was held, and in September 2003 EPA officially placed the site on the NPL.

risk from long-term exposure. Illinois Department of Public Health collected additional off-site soil samples from different locations in 1999 and determined that the contamination did not pose a health risk from long-term or short-term exposure. Concentrations of some chemicals in the samples, however, did exceed safe levels set by Illinois EPA and warrant further investigation of off-site soils.

## **Who will pay for the cleanup?**

Under the Superfund law, potentially responsible parties include past and present owners and operators of a site. EPA has entered into negotiations with the PRPs for the M&H site. If negotiations are unsuccessful, then money from the Superfund could be used to conduct a remedial investigation. The purpose of this investigation would be to determine the nature and extent of contamination and any risks that contamination might pose to human health and the environment.

## **What we heard**

The questions EPA asked residents and a summary of their responses follows.

### **Are you aware of contamination at the former Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc site?**

Many residents had first-hand knowledge of activities at the site as they were living in the area at the time of its operation. Those who were familiar with the site knew that it had produced zinc. Most individuals were aware that the property currently contains a chemical company. Opinions varied on how much pollution was associated with the site, with several individuals remembering that children used to play on the slag piles. Those new to the area were unaware of the prior operations at the site, nor were they aware of any potential pollution associated with the site.

### **What are your concerns about the contamination at M&H Zinc?**

Concerns were raised about the site's impact on residential property values and about the time frame of the cleanup.

Residents also asked the following questions about the site that will be addressed as further investigation is completed:

- What contaminants were found on the site?
- Is airborne pollution a problem?
- Is fishing in the Illinois River affected?

- What's been coming from the Carus Chemical Co. since the late 1960's? Could whatever's been released from Carus Chemical have caused allergies, respiratory problems and trouble with growing grass?
- Is the state testing above and below the Little Vermilion River? How far down does the contamination go? Is the slag next to the Little Vermilion River dangerous? Should we be concerned with the white powder seen on the surface and the green water in the river?

### **How long have you been aware of the contamination/impending cleanup at M&H Zinc?**

Long-time residents were well aware of the site, however, most didn't know any specifics concerning contamination/cleanup at the site. Newer residents knew nothing about the situation.

### **Are you aware of the site's public involvement process? If yes, what are your perceptions of it?**

Most were not aware of any public involvement concerning the site.

### **Have you had contact with government officials about M&H Zinc?**

Residents had not had contact with government officials about the site.

### **Do you feel that local, state and federal officials (including EPA) have been responsive to your concerns?**

According to the mayor of LaSalle, EPA has been keeping him informed of activities at the site.

### **How frequently do you believe meetings should be held in the community to discuss activities at M&H Zinc?**

Residents expressed mixed opinions on public meetings to discuss site activities. Several individuals indicated they would attend meetings and think that others would as well. One person suggested the meetings should cover the proposed remediation and time frame. Others indicated they would not attend and they did not think that people would come to such meetings.

### **Do you have location preference(s) for the meetings?**

The Library Community Room and the City Council Chamber at City Hall were the locations suggested for public meetings.



United States  
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## **MATTHIESSEN & HEGELER ZINC SITE: EPA Seeking Your Opinion About Polluted Site**

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### **Do you want to receive information about M& H Zinc? Do you have a preference about how information about M&H Zinc is delivered?**

All interviewees would like to receive more information about the site. Most preferred to receive newsletters or letters.

Although newspapers were identified as a good way to dispense information, most felt mail was better to insure the information was not missed. Posting information about the site online and e-mail delivery of information were also suggested.

### **Do you feel the site has received adequate coverage by the local/regional media?**

Most residents and officials did not remember any media coverage.

Some residents had seen articles in the local media but it had been some time ago.

### **What type of media (for example, newspaper, Internet, radio) do you rely on for information about the site?**

Most residents indicated that the *LaSalle Daily News Tribune* was their main source of information. The *Peoria Journal Star* (local section) is another paper read by the majority of those interviewed.

Others rely primarily on area television and radio stations for their local information. *WLPO-AM* was the radio station suggested by most as a potential source of information about the site.

**Do you share the opinions summarized above?  
Do you want to share additional  
information with us?**

**Call Yolanda Bouchee at (312) 353-3209**