Illinois Village Sues Oil Firms over Pollution

the Associated Press

EDWARDSVILLE, Ill. (AP) — An Illinois village has sued Shell, ConocoPhillips and a local refinery, accusing them of releasing millions of pounds of cancer-causing pollutants and failing to repair broken pipelines and other problems at the refinery.

The lawsuit filed Tuesday on behalf of Roxana, a village northeast of St. Louis, lists 18 incidents over several years during which it claims benzene and other pollutants were spilled into the air, water and soil, The (Alton) Telegraph reported Wednesday (http://bit.ly/GD7iDv [1]).

The village is trying to recover the costs of removing pollutants from water and limiting damage to public health, as well as court costs.

"The sheer number of releases of toxic chemicals into the environment in the past 25 years suggests that defendants have overseen, allowed and ignored or failed to remedy systemic problems with pipeline and refinery operation and maintenance," the lawsuit says.

Phillips Petroleum Corp. acquired the Wood River Refinery in 2001, the year before the merger that formed ConcoPhillips.

"We certainly know that there are ongoing issues regarding historic operations of the Wood River refinery from prior owners," said ConocoPhillips spokeswoman Janet Grothe. "However, we are very disappointed that the suit attacks the operations of the refinery on our watch. We have always strived to maintain the highest degree of professionalism and integrity at Wood River."

Grothe said the accusations would be "vigorously challenged."

Kayla Macke, a spokeswoman for Shell Oil Co., which had owned the facility in the past, said the company had not received a copy of the lawsuit and could not immediately comment.

Reports show that Shell and other refiners in the area have released more than 13.3 million pounds of volatile organic compounds into the village's air since 1988, according to the lawsuit. It claims Roxana's groundwater, land and air have been contaminated.

Shell and others also face a class action lawsuit, plus several personal injury suits from people who claim the pollution caused blood cancers.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has increased its monitoring of the site over the past year and is requiring Shell Oil Products to investigate and contain hydrocarbon contamination along the refinery's western boundary.

The Simmons law firm, which filed the suit, said benzene contamination on village property has measured as high as 2.6 million percent of allowable limits set by the Illinois Pollution Control Board in testing done by Shell's contractor, URS Corp.

"Shell's own testing and reports show that benzene and other toxic chemicals have spilled or leaked from the refinery onto the property of the village of Roxana, contaminating the streets, alleys, rights of way, the groundwater and, in particular, the village's public works yard," said Derek Brandt, who is leading the firm's efforts on behalf of the village.

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Information from: The Telegraph, http://www.thetelegraph.com *[2].*

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