

Ohio EPA Records Reveal that Ashta Chemicals' Plant Lost 415 Pounds of Mercury

Ashtabula Plant Fails to Control its Toxic Mercury

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Recent company records obtained by Oceana from the Ohio EPA reveal that Ashta Chemicals reported "losing" 415 pounds of toxic mercury in 2009. In the past, Ashta reported "lost" mercury to the U.S. EPA as "fugitive" mercury emissions, which are released from the plant without being measured. Therefore, it's likely that much if not all of this "lost" mercury was emitted into Ohio's air. For the past three years, Ashta Chemicals reported to the U.S. EPA that it emitted no fugitive mercury into the air. Oceana challenged these findings with its own air monitoring, which suggested the plant was in fact emitting mercury, and those findings are corroborated by the company's report to the Ohio EPA. These reports reveal that the company has carelessly handled and tracked its toxic mercury, which threatens public health.

Oceana's recent air monitoring tests revealed that the out-dated plant underreported its toxic emissions. Oceana's testing discovered mercury concentrations up to 35 times higher than detected at a reference site 14 miles west of the Ashtabula plant, in air downwind of the Ashtabula plant. This mercury pollution level is similar to the maximum level detected by a 2005 air survey conducted around another chlor-alkali plant. This other plant reported emitting more than 500 pounds of mercury annually, roughly the same amount that Ashta reported losing in 2009. Oceana suspects that the Ashta plant could be releasing similar amounts of mercury, on the order of 500 pounds, which Ashta's report to the Ohio EPA supports.

In its report to the Ohio EPA, Ashta Chemicals also revealed it added 11,000 pounds of new mercury to its manufacturing process in 2009. This would be unnecessary if the plant would modernize with mercury-free technology. Continually using, losing and adding more mercury to the plant risks further environmental contamination. Ashta is one of only four U.S. plants that refuse to modernize. The company is currently fighting federal legislation that would require it to shift to cleaner, more efficient technology.

Among other alarming findings from its report to the Ohio EPA:

- The company buried highly-contaminated materials on its grounds, without first evaluating how these materials would affect local soils and run-off.
- Company employees discovered a liquid mercury "spill" on the plant's roof.
- The company reported it did not wash down its hydrogen piping system from July through November, an essential practice to reduce mercury emissions.

About Ashta Chemicals:

Ashta Chemicals is the smallest of four remaining mercury-cell chlor-alkali facilities in the United States. Built in 1963, the plant currently manufactures chlorine and potassium hydroxide.

Due to a 2004 court settlement with the Ohio EPA about excessive mercury discharges into Lake Erie, Ashta is required to submit annual reports to account for all mercury used in its manufacturing process.

Most, if not all, of the plant's chlorine is sold to nearby Millennium Chemicals, to aid in manufacturing titanium dioxide, a white-color enhancer and common ingredient of sunscreen and cosmetic products. Potassium hydroxide (also known as caustic potash) may be used to manufacture detergent, fertilizer and many other products. Two of Ashta Chemicals' domestic competitors, which also produce potassium hydroxide, have already modernized their plants with mercury-free chlor-alkali technology. This technology neither uses nor emits mercury and reduces energy costs as much as 37 percent. For some chlor-alkali manufacturers, this mercury-free technology has paid for itself within five years, by reducing operating costs.

About Oceana:

Oceana, an international ocean conservation group, has campaigned since 2005 to phase out mercury-cell chlor-alkali technology. During this time, Oceana has successfully pressured three chlor-alkali plants to install mercury-free technology. Two other plants have shut down, rather than convert.

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Currently, Oceana is urging the U.S. Congress to pass the *Mercury Pollution Reduction Act* (H.R. 2190, S. 1428). The House version of the bill would require Ashta Chemicals' plant and other U.S. plants to stop emitting mercury by mid-2013 or modernize with new technology by mid-2015.

For more information about Oceana's mercury campaign, visit www.oceana.org/mercury.