



**OPERATING WITHIN  
STRICT  
ENVIRONMENT  
AGENCY LEVELS  
THIS COMPANY**

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**RELEASED 5,340 TONNES  
OF POISONOUS CHEMICALS  
IN ONE YEAR**

**NO THREAT TO HUMAN HEALTH CLAIM  
"POVERTY THE CAUSE OF ILL-HEALTH  
NOT POLLUTION" SAYS TOWN'S MP**

Merseyside and the North West have the worst polluting industries in England and Wales.

Friends of the Earth's report 'Factory Watch', lists the top polluters and named Associated Octel at Ellesmere Port as the top of the league with Runcorn's ICI in second place.

The news that Octel was Britain's filthiest factory in 1996 came as no real surprise to the residents of Ellesmere Port who have been the victims of high emissions and shoddy maintenance within the chemical industry for decades. Octel themselves were prosecuted and fined £290,000 for a dangerous fire

that occurred in February 1994 due to poor maintenance procedures. (see *TaxCat* vol2 No2 Spring 96)

It also came as no surprise to environmental activists living in the area that the publication of the report hardly caused a ripple among the communities of the North West's Toxic Towns.

The people of this part of

Cheshire and Merseyside are used to heavy industrial pollution. This familiarity seems to have affected their ability to understand the very real dangers to their health. Over the last 50 odd years, and probably longer, they have been deliberately misled by company spokesmen, local authorities and regulatory officials, who have all downgraded the dangers to health after each fire, explosion, chemical release or spillage within the chemical industry.

Octel are reported to have released a total 5,340 tonnes (around 14 tonnes a day) of highly poisonous chemicals. These include chloroethane, vinyl bromide, and about 66 tonnes of lead, into the atmosphere about a town of between 70-80,000 residents.

These residents had more disturbing news when it was revealed that the company were legally permitted to release this amount and had broken no regulations.

"This is frightening. We are forever hearing about there being strict regulations in place to protect public health, but we have yet to see any real evidence of them." said Jason Byrnes a local resident.

The apologists' for the company were out in force to greenwash the situation. One representative appeared on television holding a small canister of Chloroethane (Ethyl Chlorine) saying how: "it was used in hospital operating theatres as an anaesthetic."

This attempt to convince the general public the chemical was 'completely' harmless did not fool all the town's residents.

"Most of us are aware that the use of this chemical in the controlled environment of a hospital theatre is vastly different than its release from an industrial chimney stack", said Marj Lancaster 'Smith

of the South Wirral Against Pollution Group (SWAP).

The company spokesman neglected to say that accidental death has resulted from the use of this chemical an anaesthetic during major surgery and chloroethane (CE) causes cancer in rodents and is probably carcinogenic to similarly exposed humans.[1]

The attempts to reduce the seriousness of the emissions continued with the company pointing out that there is no evidence that lead, ethyl chloride or vinyl bromine causes cancer in human.

They also declared the figures released by FoE were inaccurate saying public records show the plant released 5,292 tonnes of the three chemicals - (48 tonnes less than FoE claim) and that all emissions are cleared with the Environment Agency.

"Friends of the Earth should have made it clear that the concentration of the substances emitted are so low as to present no health hazard to either the workforce or the local population, based on standards set by the Health and Safety Commission." the company said.

The reality is the plant *had* emitted over 5,000 tonnes of highly poisonous chemicals, including something like 66 tonnes of lead. Numerous studies have now shown that there is no "safe" dose of lead in children's blood so the company talk of 'no health hazard' is not a scientifically proven fact. Indeed, five years ago the U.S. National Research Council (NRC) said: "There is growing evidence that even very small exposures can lead to subtle effects in humans. Therefore, there is the possibility that future [safety] guidelines may drop below 10 µg/dl as the mechanisms of lead toxicity become better understood"[2]

Recent studies have shown lead not only diminishes intellectual



## ToxCat

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ToxCat is published on a shoe string budget by genuine 'grassroots' activists

ToxCat attempts to investigate the stories the mainstream media, particularly UK national newspaper and television media, choose to ignore for financial or political reasons.

ToxCat attempts to provide information on the technical, scientific and medical aspects of toxic stories in a language as accessible as possible given the language used by academics and bureaucrats.

ToxCat exists to provide information that will empower concerned individuals and communities to better protect the environment and their children's future well being. ToxCat provides a forum for individuals and community groups concerned about toxic pollution and its effect on health to share their experiences

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**There is growing evidence that even very small exposures can lead to subtle effects in humans. Therefore there is the possibility that future [safety] guidelines may drop...**

capacity of the developing child, it also causes loss of hearing, reduces hand-eye co-ordination, impairs the ability to pay attention and creates a propensity towards violence.

Professor Gordon McVie, director general of Cancer Research Campaign said: "Lead becomes concentrated in the kidney area. And as a whole host of inhaled particles can lead to lung cancer. Benzene types are associated with leukaemia."[3]

Associated Octel maintain: "the company is committed to continuous improvement. In the past two years airborne emissions from this site have been reduced by over 1,000 tonnes. Emission levels will continue to fall during 1999 to a level of less than half of the 1996 level."

Does this mean the residents of Ellesmere Port can look forward to *only* having 2,500 tonnes of poisonous chemicals pumped out over their heads this year by Octel one might ask?

Obviously whatever amount of poisonous chemicals this particular company pumps out is of no concern to some members of the public. A couple of relatives of workers at the plant expressed their support for the company in the local press. One woman declared her "family are all right" (Jack?) and "her son worked at Octel and he is healthy."

Another woman blamed the lack of businesses coming to E Port not on industries like Octel who actually cause the pollution, but on concerned citizens who make public the facts about the pollution.

"This mentality takes some believing but shows that some people today put jobs and money before the health of children." said Ralph Ryder of CATs. "I am not unduly worried about the woman whose son works at the plant. He gets well paid to put up with the hazards and should be fully aware of the dangers. It's the 70,000 plus residents who don't work at the plant and the children of the area who are on the receiving end of all this pollution that concerns me. My 3 children are adults now, 2 are asthmatic, I have three grandchildren, all are asthmatic. Have you ever seen a 8 month old baby having to be

**My 3 children are adults now, 2 are asthmatic, I have three grandchildren, all are asthmatic. Have you ever seen a 8 month old baby having to be given an inhaler every day? It is very disturbing. Yet it is happening in households all over this region.**

given an inhaler every day? It is very disturbing. Yet this is happening in households all over this region.

"A number of Octel workers drink in my local pub, most have kept well away but one tried to tell me how well the company was doing." said Mr. Ryder. "I wonder if he'll feel the same if he is one of those made redundant as some of the workforce will be in the near future".

Industry Minister John Battle who was on a whistle-stop tour of Wirral at the time the report was released said:

"There's no safety problem but we all want to see levels of pollution coming down."

Steve Broughton of Environmental watchdogs the Environment Agency (EA) said: "We are aware that the North West Region has many of the factories towards the top of the list, but that is to be expected because the region was the birthplace of the industrial revolution.

A lot of heavy industry is situated here and a lot of the pollution the agency is tackling is the legacy of pollution from many years ago."

The north West agency's general manager Justin McCracken said: "We set emission limits for factories based on their impact on the local environment. This involves taking expert advice on possible health effects. The agency does not hesitate to take whatever legal action is necessary to ensure required standards are met by factories and that the environment is protected." [4]

"This is simply not true" said Mr Ryder. "Emission levels are set in a political and cost effective process, not at a level that will ensure public safety. I wouldn't say 19% was a legacy from *many* years ago. This is the usual regurgitated bullsh\*t we get from the EA. Whenever the public question the toxicity of chemicals released by industry they always say "the amount of chemicals released are only small, or to use their favourite word, 'insignificant' amounts' and poise no threat to health". We only have to look at the PCBs in the tissues of

Polar bears in the Arctic to see the accumulative effect of these 'insignificant' amounts. The EA is again showing itself to be completely inefficient as a public watchdog."

In a letter to the local *Pioneer* newspaper the town's MP Andrew Miller, told residents: "There's no need to panic and there's certainly no need to move out of Ellesmere Port. These figures are from 1996." (*In other words it's too late now folks?*)

One week later he wrote a letter attempting to deflect any blame for ill-health caused by industrial emissions saying the: "cause for ill-health in the town was poverty."

His reluctance to accept the release of 5,340 tonnes of health damaging chemicals as having anything to do with illnesses in the area is bewildering. There are a number of valid scientific studies showing industrial emissions are a major cause of ill health. One examined the characteristics (race, gender, weight, height and lifestyle habits) of 552,138 people and confirmed that there is a clear relationship between fine particulate air pollution and human deaths.[5] Another shows that 20 years ago it was known that particles retained in the deep lung cause long-term lung disease[6] and the recent study (1997) by E.G. Knox and E.A. Oilman '*Hazard proximities of childhood cancers in Great Britain from 1953-80*' is even more proof.[7] Mr. Miller has obviously not taken the time to read any of these.

**ToxCat's View:** Whatever Andrew Miller and other apologists' for Octel say, it is a **fact** is that this company released in one year over **5,000 tonnes** of health damaging chemicals into the environment of Ellesmere Port and Mersey side Some of these cancer causing particles may well landed on school playgrounds where children were laughing and playing (and inhaling 25 to 30 times a minute). Some could well have

'No adequate evidence' of cancer claims, says factory

**MP and environmental bosses speak out**

landed on babies sleeping outside in their prams, or on ground where livestock **ing particles. Any resulting cancers will have nothing to do with poverty.**

**It is the presence on site of Chlorine, Lead Alkyls, Ethyl Chloride, Didromoethane and Methyl Chloride which requires the Ellesmere Port plant to operate within the CIM AH regulations. Because of the nature of these chemicals, we go to great lengths to ensure that they are always contained. However, a major accident involving any of them could result in off-site harm to people and the local environment.**

Associated Ocel Public Information Sheet.

were grazing, (thereby entering the food chain). To say this of course would be deemed by some people as 'scaremongering', but it is very likely to have happened. What *ToxCat* says is simply this:

**These chemicals will have come down to ground level at some time. Someone, somewhere will have inhaled or ingested some of those cancer caus-**

**The Environment Agency's Steve Broughton said; "We are aware that the North West region has many factories towards the top of the list but that is to be expected because the region was the birthplace of the industrial revolution.**

**"A lot of heavy industry is situated here and a lot of THE pollution the agency is tackling is the legacy of pollution from many years ago."**

**Footnote:** At the latest Environmental Health Committee meeting of Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council the 'Factorywatch' report was discussed. Dr. Paul Hunter again blamed the cancer rates in the area on smoking - not on industry. "There's nowt so blind..."

#### References

1] Chloroethane (CE) is classified by the human inhalation route as Category B2 according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 1986 Guidelines for Carcinogen Risk Assessment, and according to Proposed Guidelines for Carcinogen Risk Assessment it is classified as a likely human carcinogen. (USEPA data)

2] National Research Council (Bruce A. Fowler and others, editors). *Measuring Lead Exposure in Infants, Children, and Other Sensitive Populations* (Washington. D.C.: National Academy Press, 1993).

3] *Daily Mirror* Monday February 8th 1999, pg!9

4] *Ellesmere Port Pioneer*, February 10, 1999

5] C. Arden Pope III and others "Particulate Air Pollution as a Predictor of Mortality in a Prospective Study of US Adults" (1995)

6] National Research Council, National Academy of Science, *Air Borne Particles* (1979).

[7] E.G. Knox and E.A. Oilman "Hazard proximities of childhood cancers in Great Britain from 1953-80, " JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH Vol. 51 (1997) pgs 151-159

YOU CAN VISIT THE FOE INTERNET SITE AT: <http://www.foe.co.uk/factorywatch>

## STILL WITH



A team from the Octel factory at Ellesmere Port were in London earlier this month (February) to present a conference of industrial relations.

Octel representatives were at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre to show how some of their initiatives were helping to transform their performance. A joint management and union team demonstrated how their partnership was affecting both business and staff development with the organisation. The team described how they were encouraging personal development through the likes of competency based training and a recently opened learning centre.

The AnUman event is Britain's most prestigious industrial relation conference attended by leaders in government, business and major unions.

Ellesmere Port and Neston MP Andrew Miller was at the conference and said: "I was delighted to be present for the Octel Teams presentation - they have shown how management and trade unions can work together for the benefit of both shareholder and employee."

Source: *The Standard* No 369. 4th February 1999.

## CHEMICAL FIRMS TO BRING NEW LIFE TO WIRRAL?

*Environmentalists call for caution*

**A report commission by the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise council (CEWTEC) recommends more investment in specialist chemical companies to ensure continued growth in the Wirral Peninsular area.**

The report, produced by consultants Business Strategies based in London maintains: "To remain competitive in this sector Wirral must actively encourage investment in specialist chemicals."

"Given the problems the chemical industry have given residents of Ellesmere Port just 11 miles down the road I find this recommendation very surprising" said Ralph Ryder of CATs.

It is forecast that over the next five years growth in Wirral will be 0.2pc compared with 1.3pc and 2.3pc in the North West and the UK respectively.

Colin Langford of the Wirral Environmental Protection Group advised caution over the scheme and asked: "Does high value chemicals mean high risk?"

"We would obviously need to study proposals very carefully. We are all for investment in Wirral, but not at the expense of the health and general well-being of its residents."

Wirral MBC have invested a lot of money in restoring New Brighton to something like its former glory. The proposed Ocean Dome is acknowledged in the report as being a major influence on the economic growth of the area. The consultants say this facility would increase the number of day and overnight visitors and give a boost to hotel, catering and other related services.

Source: *Liverpool Daily Post*, Monday, January 18, 1999