



Green Beagle



PRESS RELEASE

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Civil society and Provincial Environmental Protection Bureau work to address false Environmental Impact Assessment of polluting company

Environmental NGO, Green Beagle, worked with the Shandong Provincial Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB) to address false Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) information from Union Chemical. A pollution victim, @寿光联盟化工环评, who lives next to the Union Chemical Plant and suffers from the massive pollution and bad odors, played an important role in the investigation which uncovered numerous violations of Chinese law. “This case demonstrates the important roles of civil society and EPBs in uncovering the facts about EIA reports from polluting companies. The next step is full compliance with Chinese law,” said Xie Xinyuan, Green Beagle. The NGO, which continuously follows up the case, conducted the work as part of its project, “Strengthening the capacity of pollution victims and civil society organizations to increase chemical safety in China” (1).

Last July, netizen @寿光联盟化工环评, a pollution victim who lives next to Union Chemical Plant, reported on Weibo that the Union Chemical’s EIA performed in 2004 held back some important facts. Green Beagle worked with @寿光联盟化工环评 to demonstrate that the location of the project shown on one map of the report contradicted with that on another map. In addition, the EIA report omitted important pollution factors such as particulate matter and nitrogen oxides leaving pollution predictions of only sulfur dioxide. These pollutants are important components of China’s national air quality standard and should be part of an EIA application. 寿光联盟化工环评 appealed to Shandong Provincial EPB on the internet for action.

However, the first reply of the government department disappointed the villager and community members since it focused on only one mistake in the EIA report: in 2004 there were 613 residents instead of 286 as reported by the EIA. The reply avoided important potential violations of Chinese law. “The consequences of Union Chemical operations in the community are serious. We have suffered for years from the massive pollution, odor, and noise from the plant and in my case, there was only one street between our home and the factory,” said @寿光联盟化工环评, a resident of Houzhang Village, Shengcheng Town of Shouguang City in Shandong Province where Union Chemical is located. Although the plant decided to close in September 2012, the company launched an even larger industrial project in the northern part of the city.

Nevertheless, the provincial EPB also said in its Weibo (2) response that it would send a petition to the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) to punish the EIA institute that performed the assessment for Union Chemical, Shandong Province Metallurgical Engineering Co. Ltd. In November 2012, Green Beagle applied to the MEP for disclosure of the petition. To Green Beagle’s surprise, MEP replied, “We have not received the petition.” Xie Xinyuan, Green Beagle, posted MEP’s reply on Weibo which triggered hundreds of responses from netizens and community members as well as the Shandong Province EPB.

- MORE FOLLOWS -

On December 13, 2013, the Shandong Province EPB revealed that the original Union Chemical EIA contained false and incomplete information. The agency revealed the following violations in the EIA report for Union Chemical's project in Houzhang Village: 1) the number of potentially impacted residents was incorrectly under reported; 2) important pollutants such as hydrogen sulfide and ammonia were ignored; 3) hazardous waste was not analyzed in the EIA as required; 4), the air quality of Houzhang Village and Qianzhang Village, including sensitive points within the health protection distance, was not monitored and pollutants such as hydrogen sulfide, ammonia and methanol gas were not monitored in other sensitive areas; and 5), pollution of nitrogen oxides, hydrogen sulfide and methanol as well as unplanned emissions were not predicted.

The Shandong Province EPB then circulated a notice of criticism among local EPBs and EIA institutes in the province against Shandong Province Metallurgical Engineering Co. Ltd. for EIA falsification. In addition, the Shandong Province EPB charged Weifang Municipal EPB, the local EPB in charge of approving the EIA report, with dereliction of duty.

"This case raises concerns about the quality of EIA reports and illustrates the importance of enforcing Chinese law," said Xie Xinyuan. "The local EPB and the EIA consulting company were punished; now Union Chemical as the polluter should pay."

"I hope this case can become a little footnote in a larger story about how ordinary citizens can take action to clean up their communities." said @寿光联盟化工, who is still pushing for a toxics-free environment in Houzhang Village.

Footnotes:

(1) Strengthening the capacity of pollution victims and civil society organizations to increase chemical safety in China is an EU-funded project of IPEN with partners Arnika – Toxics and Waste Programme and Green Beagle that aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and communities impacted by pollution to increase chemical safety in China. The Project (also known as the China Chemical Safety Project) is being implemented in China over two years with the EU contribution.

(2) The screenshot of the official Weibo of the provincial EPB of Shandong on the punishment of the fraud EIA statement



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