

SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors

Joint project of The Other Media, FEDCOT, Global Community Monitor and monitors from Eachangadu, Sangolikuppam and Semmankuppam

Tagros Public Hearing Illegal, Groups Say

CUDDALORE, 7 September, 2004 – SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors, FEDCOT and The Other Media demanded that the public hearing for pesticide manufacturer Tagros Chemicals expansion be nullified if reports that the Company has already constructed the building and commenced production are confirmed. While today's public hearing is claimedly being held to seek clearance for expansion of production capacity from 471 tonnes/year to 1359 tonnes/year, Tagros' website states that "A modern production unit is situated around 200 kms from Chennai (Madras) with a 1500 metric ton/annum capacity." This indicates that expansion has been effected without any consents from the TNPCB, Factories Inspectorate or other relevant departments.

Moreover, chemicals such as Hexaconazole, Tricyclazole, Propiconazole, Oxytoclozanide and Metaphenoxy benzyl alcohol that are proposed to be added already feature in Tagros' existing product mix. A complaint seeking the TN Pollution Control Board to investigate this matter and cancel the public hearing has drawn no response.

"Tagros is making a mockery of the law, and holding the Supreme Court's directions in contempt by holding a public hearing after completing construction and commencing production," said M. Nizamudeen, General Secretary, FEDCOT. "While we were unable to confirm our reports because of the Pollution Control Board's habitual reluctance to part with public information, we feel that reports from workers and SIPCOT residents raise sufficient doubt to warrant an investigation."

In March 2004, the Supreme Court reiterated that the Pollution Control Board can issue a "Consent to Establish" only after the public hearing has been conducted.

Commenting on Tagros' EIA, Dr. Mark Chernaik, staff scientist of Oregon, US-based ELAW-US writes: "As such, the facility uses extraordinary quantities of chemicals that cause cancer and other serious health effects, including neurological disease." For instance, every day, the company uses more than 4 tons of Carbon tetrachloride, 1 ton of ethylene dichloride and 280 kg of acetonitrile. Carbon tetrachloride and Ethylene dichloride cause liver and kidney damage, and are probable human carcinogens. Acetonitrile can cause cyanide poisoning, and effects on the Central Nervous System including headaches, numbness and tremors.

A June 2004 ambient air sample taken downwind of Tagros Chemicals by SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors contained extremely high levels of many of the raw materials used in Tagros. This means toxic chemicals from the factory are escaping into the air that people breathe. The analyses, which was done at a US EPA approved laboratory in California, found that Carbon tetrachloride levels in the Tagros sample was 11,538 times above the US EPA Screening Levels and 250 times higher than WHO

guidelines for safe exposure. Levels of Ethylene dichloride were nearly 23,000 times above US EPA Screening Levels for lifetime exposure.

The first SIPCOT Air Quality report containing these and results of other samples taken in SIPCOT will be released on 17 September, 2004, in Cuddalore.

“Tagros is a Bhopal in the making. The combination of illegalities, Government complicity and dangerous chemicals that is present in this case provides a conducive atmosphere for a Bhopal-like disaster to happen,” said Nityanand Jayaraman of The Other Media. “It is becoming clear that the Tamilnadu Government is willing to even sacrifice the lives of the people of SIPCOT, Cuddalore to accommodate a toxic and illegal factory like Tagros.”

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