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WZZM13 NEWS

# BP gets OK to dump mercury into Lake Michigan

By Bobby Carmichael, USA TODAY

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A BP refinery in Indiana will be allowed to continue to dump mercury into Lake Michigan under a permit issued by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

The permit exempts the BP plant at Whiting, Ind., 3 miles southeast of Chicago, from a 1995 federal regulation limiting mercury discharges into the Great Lakes to 1.3 ounces per year.

The BP plant reported releasing 3 pounds of mercury through surface water discharges each year from 2002 to 2005, according to the Toxics Release Inventory, a database on pollution emissions kept by the Environmental Protection Agency that is based on information reported by companies.

The permit was issued July 21 in connection with the plant's \$3.8 billion expansion, but only late last week began to generate public controversy. It gives the company until at least 2012 to meet the federal standard.

The action was denounced by environmental groups and members of Congress.

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"With one permit, this company and this state are undoing years of work to keep pollution out of our Great Lakes," said Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Ill., co-sponsor of a resolution overwhelmingly approved by the House last week that condemned BP's plans.

Studies have shown that mercury, a neurotoxin, is absorbed by fish and can be harmful if eaten in significant quantities, particularly by pregnant women and children. Each of the eight Great Lakes states warns residents to avoid certain kinds of fish or limit consumption.

The permit comes as the states, working with the federal government, are trying to implement the \$20 billion Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy, an umbrella plan to restore the health of the lakes signed in late 2005.

Indiana officials said the amount of mercury released by BP was minor.

"The permitted levels will not affect drinking water, recreation or aquatic life," Indiana Department of Environmental Management Commissioner Thomas Easterly told the Chicago Tribune.

BP said it doubted that any municipal sewage treatment plant or industrial plant could meet the stringent federal standards.

"BP will work with (Indiana regulators) to minimize mercury in its discharge, including implementation of source controls," the company said, according to the Tribune.

Part of the concern is that the Great Lakes have only one outlet - the St. Lawrence River.

"Lake Michigan is like a giant bathtub with a really, really slow drain and a dripping faucet, so the toxics build up over time," said Emily Green, director of the Great Lakes program for the Sierra Club.

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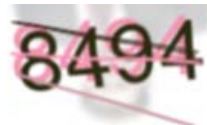
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