

Germany: Envio workers contaminated with both PCB and dioxin

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The extent of Dortmund's environmental scandal is assuming ever greater dimensions. Research by an editor of the *Westfälische Rundschau* newspaper has shown that the employees at the Envio recycling company were poisoned not only with PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), but also dioxins, which are almost as dangerous.

It was already known that workers at the company had for years been heavily contaminated with carcinogenic and highly toxic PCBs. The authorities had long ignored anonymous complaints from employees who provided information about criminal activities replete with insider details. PCB levels measured in the blood of Envio workers exceeded standard levels by up to 25,000-fold. Residents and workers in nearby companies were also contaminated, as well as children and relatives who apparently came into contact with the poison through clothing washed together with the employees' work clothes.

In recent weeks, further details and background information have come to light, indicating that the horror stories of the last few months were only the tip of the iceberg.

A team of specialists from the University Hospital of Aachen has begun work in Dortmund's Miners' Hospital to develop a comprehensive and efficient support programme for former Envio workers.

By September 17, blood samples were taken from 200 individuals who were also tested for levels of dioxins. Initial results confirmed the worst fears. Twelve of the first thirteen samples revealed dioxins, which have properties similar to PCBs and can also cause cancer. Like PCBs, they are among the well-known "dirty dozen" toxic substances whose handling was banned by the Stockholm Convention of May 2001. In addition, it has been found that more relatives

of the Envio workers, including children, were contaminated by indirect contact with the toxic chemicals than had previously been thought.

On September 24, the *Westfälische Rundschau* (WR) reported that the Envio company had cooperated with criminal elements. The newspaper declared, "[T]he Dortmund PCB firm had even worked together with criminals from Kazakhstan to import thousands of contaminated capacitors and to dispose of them at Dortmund's Hartmannstraße port in a very improper way".

According to the WR, this has already led to the imprisonment of a minister and several government leaders in the former Soviet Republic. The paper stated, "Documents available to this newspaper prove that over 10,000 capacitors were transported from Kazakhstan to Envio by air and rail. Were the sources of these transports to be traced, they would lead to internationally operating criminals".

According to WR, the deal between Kazakhstan and Envio was organised by the wheeler-dealer, Boris Meckler. Meckler, a German-Kazakh, has connections at the highest levels of government. In October 2007, he accompanied then-Federal Minister of Economics Michael Glos (CSU-Christian Social Union) on "an official trip to Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. His interests at that time were 'Consulting and Export'", the paper reports. "Meckler is also well known in Kazakhstan. There, his corporate objectives include 'planning and organising the training of special anti-terrorism forces'". It is assumed that Meckler continues to maintain contacts with the intelligence community, although he denies doing so.

Because unsavoury means were adopted to clinch the Kazakhstan deal, transportation and health safety standards were abandoned, and money for services

simply disappeared. “Meanwhile, Kazakh Environment Minister Nurlan Iskakov has landed in prison—for embezzlement and corruption”, writes the WR. “The verdict in October last year resulted in a sentence of four years in prison”.

Iskakov’s two deputies and some of his former staff are also now behind bars. “One of the businessmen from the Meckler milieu involved in the deal got six years in prison. His financial secretary has disappeared without trace and is being pursued internationally with ‘wanted’ posters”. Other suspects in the corruption case are believed to come from the murky environs of the Kazakh secret service.

Although Envio has been shut down in Dortmund, the Kazakh government is insisting on contractual compliance. According to the Kazakh ministry for the environment, 5,946 PCB-capacitors were to be transported to the Ruhr region by mid-2011. Meckler and Envio say they are working on a settlement.

This is in line with Envio’s usual behaviour, namely subordinating everything—whether health and safety regulations, pollution control requirements, or corporate law—to the interests of profit-making.

Thus, for example, a new company was founded for almost every business sector, apparently in order to separate each area of business from the others so that liability for commercial misdemeanours would only apply to individual sections of the firm’s consolidated assets. The official commercial register documents 12 firms somehow associated with Envio, Ltd., (plus two joint-stock companies)—either for business with Kazakhstan, trading in biogas or other enterprises. Thus, Envio continues to rake in profits, even though its operations in Dortmund have now been shut down.

Envio evidently enjoys the support of the state authorities in all this. The Dortmund public prosecutor shows little enthusiasm for its investigations into the firm. The senior public prosecutor, Dr. Ina Holznagel, says she has to date “no evidence of deliveries from Kazakhstan”.

On the other hand, the Arnsberg regional administration is in possession of documents relating to transactions with the Kazakh environment ministry, as well as further detailed information concerning health and safety violations and illegal practices at Envio. But senior public prosecutor Holznagel seems unconcerned about this. Commenting on the behaviour

of the supervisory authorities, she told the *Westfälische Rundschau*, “We could have shut down the company, but we didn’t have to”. The Arnsberg regional authorities “proceeded gently when exercising their discretionary powers”, she declared.

So gently, indeed, that the Envio workers and even their children have now been poisoned and will have to suffer the consequences of the authorities’ complicity for most of their lives.



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