

# Democrats cover up extent of hexavalent chromium poisoning at public meeting in Detroit suburb

Kevin Reed  
6 February 2020

Hundreds of local residents attended an informational meeting on Monday night in Madison Heights, Michigan organized by Democratic Party officials seeking to contain public anger over the contamination of the surface and ground water in the area by cancerous industrial chemicals.

The meeting was organized after revelations that a shuttered industrial facility in the Detroit suburb had been oozing the highly toxic hexavalent chromium into the groundwater for several years. The leak was discovered on December 20 by motorists who spotted the yellow-green substance bubbling up between concrete slabs on the shoulder of the Interstate 696 freeway.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), hexavalent chromium is harmful to the eyes, skin and respiratory system, and is considered an occupational carcinogen.

After an investigation, government officials reported that the source of the spill was the basement of Electro-Plating Service, Inc., located near the freeway service drive. Additional tests have shown that the surface water in the area, including the nearby Bear Creek that leads into Lake St. Clair, showed the presence of excessive levels of cancer-causing PFAS contaminants.

Throughout the crisis in Madison Heights, government officials have told citizens not to worry about contamination of the water supply. However, from the initial report in 2017 that the Electro-Plating Services, Inc. facility was being “cleaned-up” by the EPA, to the latest revelations that the ground and surface water are contaminated with numerous toxic chemicals—including cyanide, trichloroethylene (TCE) and hexavalent chromium—it is clear that government

officials are seeking to conceal the full extent of the danger.

Held in the auditorium of the high school in Madison Heights, the event featured presentations by local, state and federal elected officials as well as representatives from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

It quickly became clear to those in attendance that the main object of the meeting was to both cover up the extent of the chemical poisoning of the public in Detroit and throughout the state of Michigan, and to absolve the Democrats and government environmental officials from any responsibility for the disaster.

The first speaker was US Representative Andy Levin of Bloomfield Township who said that the toxic I-696 ooze was “in a weird way a blessing,” because it revealed the problem so visibly to motorists. Levin said that this was a “signal” that sites of toxic pollution are hiding from public view.

Levin said that there were more than 9,000 hazardous sites across the state of Michigan, but not enough money in the state or federal budget to clean them up. As members of the audience became restless with this report, Levin exited the meeting saying he had to return to Washington, DC for the State of the Union speech on Tuesday night.

State Representative Jim Ellison of Royal Oak reiterated the claim by Levin that there were no funds available to clean up the vast number of toxic industrial sites in Michigan that were poisoning the public. Ellison’s solution—which was met with enthusiastic applause from the panelists but not from the audience—was to sponsor legislation in Michigan to

punish industrialists like the owner of the Electro-Plating Services site, Gary Sayers, who has been convicted and sent to jail for illegally disposing of toxic chemicals.

The “Bad Actor-Polluter Pay” bill package—which was hastily pulled together prior to the informational meeting on Monday—would increase financial and criminal penalties on companies that contaminate the environment. Ellison did not explain how this money is going to be collected from marginal and bankrupt businesses like that run by Sayers, who has already been fined \$1.5 million and is now serving a one-year prison sentence.

The concept of the “bad actor polluter” was a central theme of the meeting. While operators such as Sayers are criminally responsible for carelessly and selfishly contaminating the environment, the politicians and environmental officials would have the public believe that these practices are confined to a small group of “bad actors.” The reality is capitalist enterprises from the largest auto manufacturer to the smallest parts supplier have been poisoning the environment with toxic chemical for decades while government regulators looked the other way.

The presentations at the meeting by representatives of Michigan EGLE and US EPA were deliberately abstruse when outlining the investigative techniques, water testing methods and chemical contaminants. These details were used to confuse the public and overwhelm attendees with scientific jargon.

The officials entered the meeting on the defensive as an EGLE representative explained, “I understand that trust is low in the government. And I understand that, as a representative of a government agency in Michigan, I am working in the shadow of the Flint water crisis.”

The meeting was moderated by Mike Watza, an attorney with extensive connections to both the political and corporate establishment in Michigan. Watza’s role was to make it clear that none of the sentiments of the public would be permitted to be expressed at the meeting. He explained that all questions were to be directed to the panelists in written form. In this way, the organizers sought to ensure that the meeting did not erupt with anger and hostility to the politicians and environmental officials.

Once those in attendance began to realize that the

meeting was a public relations stunt that would not provide answers to their questions about the extent of the poisoning, or what was being done to clean up the toxic contamination or prevent the pollution going forward, they began heading for the exits.

Several of those in attendance spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* as they were leaving. One resident said, “I have lived in Madison Heights for 27 years and am located right near the freeway where the spill took place. What is happening here and what happened in Flint are truly tragic. I do not believe that the water is okay and there are many people on my street that have gotten sick or who have cancer.” He added, “This is not a coincidence. It means that something is happening in the environment. We are being poisoned, no one is held accountable and nothing is being done by the government agencies who are supposed to protect us. The owner Sayers who is responsible for the spill was fined \$1.5 million but there are some things that money cannot buy. How do you compensate for the lives lost and the children who have been damaged?”

A retired Teamster who lost half of his pension following the crash in 2008 commented, “The government must think that we are really stupid to believe what they said tonight. What has happened is criminal and the problem is we are the ones suffering while they live high on the hog.”



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**