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States
Steel
Corporation

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May 10, 1976

The Honorable Paul G. Rogers
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Health and
the Environment
Room 2407
Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Rogers:

I have reviewed the EPA report which included R. E. Train's letter to you regarding the air episode in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, in mid-November of 1975. As vice president and general manager of the Eastern Steel Division of U. S. Steel, I was very much involved during the episode in the actions taken by U. S. Steel and the discussions with EPA. To set the record straight, I am taking this opportunity to correct certain misstatements of fact contained in Mr. Train's letter.

The chronology, as recited by Mr. Train, is reasonably accurate. However, there are areas of serious omission which, since Mr. Train alleged a lack of cooperation by U. S. Steel, are important for you to know. The following is a full statement of the significant events during the episode:

At 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 16, 1975, Allegheny County requested U. S. Steel to reduce operations at its Clairton coke works from an 18-hour cycle to a 20-hour cycle. This was accomplished by 10:00 p.m. that evening.

At 10:00 p.m., November 16, County authorities requested a further reduction in coking operations to a 24-hour cycle. This was accomplished by midnight.

During the afternoon of the 18th, two rolling mills at the Homestead Works were shut down because of the shortage of fuel gas, and at midnight, three Clairton rolling mills also were shut down.

At 1:00 a.m. on November 19, U. S. Steel voluntarily shut down the Clairton ammonia plant and switched the Clairton No. 2 boiler house from coal burning to gas in an attempt to further alleviate the total environmental condition.

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At 4:00 a.m., November 19, Allegheny County declared a 2nd stage alert and ordered U. S. Steel to further reduce production of coke by again extending the coking cycle -- now to 28 hours. This, too, was accomplished almost immediately, without question. This additional loss of coke oven gas necessitated deeper production curtailments of rolling, coating and heat treating facilities at five other U. S. Steel plants in the district. In addition, U. S. Steel voluntarily ceased all scarfing and oxy-gas burning operations at all these plants and shut down the iron foundry at the Edgar Thomson Works.

At 2:00 p.m. the same day, we were asked by the County to go to 42-hour coking. Immediately thereafter, at 2:10 p.m., we were instructed to extend coking to 48 hours by the County, and to do so in eight hours. This telephone request was made to the general superintendent at Clairton, who replied that U. S. Steel would start reducing immediately to get there as rapidly and as safely as possible, but thought it might not be possible to reach a 48-hour schedule in eight hours.

Under the existing conditions of depleted coke oven gas, safety was of extreme importance. Coke oven gas mains, totalling 14 miles in length, must be kept under pressure or a serious risk of a severe explosion or fire would exist.

Shortly after 2:30 p.m. on the 19th, I spoke on the telephone to D. J. Snyder, EPA Regional Director in Philadelphia. I repeated to Mr. Snyder that we were moving as rapidly as possible to a 48-hour cycle, but did not believe we could accomplish this in 8 hours. He replied that EPA thought we had done this before, which in fact we had not. He requested we discuss the matter with Mr. Wassersug of his office, and technical representatives of U. S. Steel did so during the afternoon.

By 4:00 p.m., 1 hour and 50 minutes after receiving instructions for the latest cutback to a 48-hour cycle, Clairton was down to a 36-hour cycle. By 8:00 p.m., a 42-hour cycle had been attained and a 48-hour cycle reached at midnight. Our employees did an incredible job of attaining this level safely. It had never before been done in such a short time.

Mr. Snyder met with personnel from United States Steel on the night of November 19, 1975. That meeting was not called by EPA and did not serve a purpose of persuading U. S. Steel to take action as implied by Mr. Train on page 4 of his letter. The necessary action to go to 48-hour coking commenced at 2:10 in the afternoon prior to any discussion with EPA personnel. The meeting consisted of a review of the events of the episode and U. S. Steel's response to cut-back requests by the County, and concluded with recognition by Mr. Snyder that U. S. Steel had fully cooperated.

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The background of the meeting of that night of November 19 is important. Congressman H. John Heinz, III, had called a press conference for 5:15 p.m., November 19, 1975, to be followed by an information gathering meeting in the Federal Building on Grant Street in Pittsburgh, Pa. U. S. Steel was invited to attend.

Accompanied by W. G. Whyte, vice president-public affairs, and Donald Clay, Eastern Area director-public affairs, I attended the press conference.

In the course of the meeting following the press conference, I was interrupted by an Assistant U. S. Attorney, Mr. Sam Orr, who indicated it was imperative that he talk with me.

Mr. Orr and another Assistant U. S. Attorney, Mr. C. McKay, informed me that Mr. Snyder was contemplating some kind of legal action although they indicated they did not know exactly what that action might be. They also suggested that I should meet with Snyder immediately. I told them to get Snyder out of the meeting, which they did, and we proceeded to the office of the U. S. Attorney. On the way, I questioned Snyder regarding his tactics to which he replied that his technical people believed we were not moving as fast to a 48-hour coking cycle as we could. At that moment, the plant was already zeroing in on a 36-hour rate.

Mr. Whyte, Mr. Clay and myself then met with Mr. Snyder and two of his technical people, representatives of Allegheny County and the two Assistant U. S. Attorneys.

At approximately 7:30 p.m., Mr. Whyte left the meeting and we were joined by Miss Dorothy Servis, general attorney, U. S. Steel Corporation, who had been called by Mr. Clay.

At no time during the meeting were there any discussions of possible legal action which might be taken.

Mr. Snyder stressed that it was imperative that the rate of coking be extended to 48 hours as soon as possible. I agreed with him and advised him that this was being done. The only area of disagreement was at what time we could safely attain this cycle.

Since I had been out of touch with conditions at the plant since leaving for the Heinz press conference, I asked Mr. Clay to call Dean Wilson, general superintendent of Clairton Works to ask him to join us.

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Upon Mr. Wilson's arrival at about 8:30 p.m., he informed us that the coking cycle was at approximately 42 hours and would attain 48 shortly after midnight.

During the meeting, the agencies were fully briefed regarding the facilities that U. S. Steel had shut down in the Mon Valley and there was discussion of what possible further curtailments should be taken if weather conditions did not improve.

We were also informed by the EPA's technical people that if the weather did not change, the area would probably not experience marked favorable effect from the 48-hour coking cycle for 24 to 48 hours.

The meeting adjourned without any request by EPA for action by U. S. Steel. The facts had demonstrated that we had taken all steps requested expeditiously.

Mr. Train's comments relative to industries' reactions in his final paragraph on page 6 of his letter are completely without justification with respect to U. S. Steel. It is an absolute untruth that U. S. Steel consented to "expeditiously extend their coking time to 48 hours only after many hours and several discussions with key corporate officials." U. S. Steel had agreed at 2:10 in the afternoon, without any discussion, to do so as expeditiously as it could safely do so.

Credit, rather than condemnation, should be given for achieving the 48-hour cycle as rapidly, and safely, as we did.

Speaking for U. S. Steel, another blatant untruth is that industry acquiesced to the public agencies' plans "because of the real possibility that EPA and the U. S. Attorney would seek emergency relief in the Federal Court." Nothing, and I repeat, nothing could be farther from the truth. I was in command of the situation and I had no contact with anyone in U. S. Steel except those in attendance at the Federal Building from 5:15 p.m. until the meeting adjourned.

It is appalling to me that such irresponsible statements are made to a key legislative chairman such as yourself, and then are widely circulated to the press and public. This lack of integrity and misuse of position by an agency is awesome.

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Included with the EPA report of the November episode is copy of a mortality study conducted under the auspices of the EPA. Inasmuch as that study is meaningless without input data and methodology, I will not comment at this time as to its validity without first having it studied. However, I am wondering why the EPA report did not also include the findings of the medical team that came to Pittsburgh to monitor the health effects of the inversion on selected school children residing within the heavily affected areas and the control group of children outside of those communities. Mr. Train refers to it on page 6 of his letter. Did EPA exclude it because the findings were negative? Or, because it did not serve the purpose of the EPA report?

Contrary to current statements regarding the apparent lack of cooperation by U. S. Steel during the November episode, Mr. Snyder commented at a press conference on November 20, 1975, about the excellent cooperation of U. S. Steel.

I am sure you will agree that well-intentioned cooperation between the agency and industry would result in much more progress on mutual problems than is achieved by the adversary approach which the agency chooses to pursue. This is clearly evidenced in Mr. Train's comments on pp. 2 and 3, where he cites a presumption that legal action would probably be necessary to obtain industry cooperation.

The news media has brought to our attention that you are now studying this EPA report to determine if a congressional investigation into the incident is necessary.

May I emphatically and clearly state that U. S. Steel would welcome an impartial, fact-finding investigation, free of political motivation or self-serving agency purposes.

For your further information, copies of this letter are being mailed to Messrs. Train, Snyder, and Congressman Gaydos and, also, will be released to the news media.

Very truly yours,

