

COMMENTARY



Omya not in violation of air rules

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By JIM REDDY

Contrary to what has been written recently on these opinion pages, Omya is in not in violation with its air emissions permits and has openly acknowledged that detectable odors are periodically present from its Florence operation. The company hired TRC, an independent environmental firm, to perform a study designed specifically to identify the source of the odor, target specific compounds, and finally determine what controls may be necessary to implement. For over a year, Omya has worked in conjunction with neighbors, the Vermont Law School, and the Agency of Natural Resources to complete this logical, three-phase scientific testing of its emissions.

Phases I and II of the study are complete, and the final phase will commence in April. The Phase II stack testing identified a number of specific chemical compounds, which are products of combustion. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and numerous other scientific and governmental authorities have found those same compounds to be present in the emissions from all combustion sources — including homes, businesses, and industries burning wood, natural gas, and No. 2 fuel oil. Those same compounds are also emitted from the combustion of fossil fuels in the trains, planes, trucks, and cars that transport us and the goods we consume.

To dry its products, Omya uses a low-sulfur No. 2 fuel oil to run the dryers. This fuel is cleaner than that customarily used by other fuel oil consumers. Even so, it makes perfect sense for such compounds — these products of combustion — to be detected in Omya's emissions. The fact that they were detected at all simply lends credibility to the scientific testing taking place.

The truth is that Omya's emissions contain the same compounds emitted by everyone's furnace, and no government agency anywhere in the United States regulates those compounds resulting from the combustion of virgin fossil fuels and wood. The only way to prevent such emissions is for all of us to stop combusting fuels altogether, but it is unlikely that anyone is ready to forgo heat, hot water, transportation, or the businesses that provide their jobs.

When Phase III of the study is complete, those data will be used to identify exactly which compounds are at levels that could cause problems, thus allowing an appropriate control strategy to be determined and implemented. Those emission data also will be used to estimate potential air concentrations off the plant site, which will be compared to applicable health-based standards to ensure that no health standard is exceeded. All phases of the study have involved Vermont Law School, the Agency of Natural Resources, and the plant neighbors most concerned about the issue.

Omya is registered to ISO 14001 — the most recognized global environmental standard. The company's environmental track record is audited twice a year, by BVQI — an independent ISO auditing agency. Omya's environmental management system is in place to better achieve improvements in its overall environmental performance. Planning activities, best practices, procedures, processes, and organizational structure are all part of the environmental management system. Under the ISO standards, Omya strives for continual improvement in these areas to maintain its good standing.

So, rather than act on impulse, Omya prefers to work with the involvement of its neighbors in a careful, methodical way to address the concerns raised. The company

prefers to utilize the best environmental management system structure for continual improvement, even though there is no regulatory requirement to do so. And finally, Omya continues its collection and objective analysis of data with participation from neighbors, the Vermont Law School, and the full oversight of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. For more information, Omya's odor study information is openly published on: www.OmyaInVermont.net

Jim Reddy is president of Omya Inc.