

Marjol stop-work order unheard Throop council incredulous at SCE's claims

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THROOP — Officials for Gould Electronics are backtracking on initial reports its contractor, SCE Environmental Group, refused to stop discharging water into Sulfur Creek when told to do so at the former Marjol site.

Council was told Tuesday by Advanced GeoServices, which represents Gould, that SCE had pumped muddy water into a small tributary of the Lackawanna River on Monday after being ordered to stop. Although muddy, testing has found the water was safe and contained no contaminants.

But at a meeting Thursday, Barbara Forslund of Advanced GeoServices said officials appear to have told the contractor to stop, but because of construction noise, workers did not hear the order.

And that left council members befuddled, noting that even with construction noise, people should be able to communicate the need to stop work.

"It's extremely hard for us to believe that," Councilman John Musewicz said.

At the meeting, SCE owner Jody Cordaro stated bluntly: "We did not disobey an order."

In the last several weeks, he said SCE has been ordered on occasion to stop work, and done so immediately. And sometimes it stopped work without being told to do so.

"Whether it's a dust issue, a health and safety issue or design issue, we stopped work ourselves," he said. "SCE has determined we weren't told to stop (on Monday)."

Mr. Cordaro added his company has a zero-tolerance rule, and if someone was found to have disobeyed an order, they would have been fired.

Federal and state agencies attended the Thursday meeting as part of their investigation of the incident, and indicated there might have been a violation.

Ms. Forslund has yet to say how much muddy water was discharged from the site, but has acknowledged muddy water is not allowed to be released into the river as a general rule for any construction project.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency official Maureen Essenthier said she was "relieved" early reports that orders were disobeyed by SCE appear inaccurate.

State Rep. Frank Shimkus, D-Throop, sat through part of Thursday's meeting and said it appeared "SCE is doing an outstanding job and the blame lay with the EPA and Gould." The legislator has been an active critic of EPA and Gould since the project to cap lead-contaminated soil and battery casings in concrete was initially announced.

"I still just do not think they're putting their full effort into this and I'm worried the people of Throop are in jeopardy," said Mr. Shimkus about the EPA and Gould.

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