

Editorial in The Scranton Times-Tribune : Marjol incident betrays trust

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Given the environmental damage to the neighborhood and the 20-year controversy over the Marjol Battery lead cleanup in Throop, it was reasonable to expect federal and state regulators, along with Gould Battery Corp. to ensure a flawless project.

Instead, the company and those regulators are investigating why cleanup contractor SCE Environmental Group discharged sediment-rich water into a tributary of the Lackawanna River.

A spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection said after the incident that tests of mud, over which the discharged water had passed, did not reveal any lead contamination. That indicates, at least, that lead from the heavily contaminated Marjol site was not discharged into the river.

Mark Carmon, the spokesman, was candid about the incident: "... the release should not have occurred. And given the high profile and the controversial nature of the project, it's just bad all around."

Much of the controversy concerned the key issue — whether to remove the contaminated soil for incineration or to "cap" the site in order to prevent the toxic material from escaping into the environment.

Regulators chose the cap, arguing that it was safer than removing the soil. Removal would have resulted in some of the toxic material being released into the air, while capping would keep it buried.

Implicit in that decision was that the toxic material would not be released into the environment during the capping project. The release into the river posed the risk of having some of that material distributed far downstream.

Gould halted work Thursday after learning that the contractor allegedly had continued to discharge the water into the tributary after being ordered to stop. That was the responsible thing to do, and it indicated the seriousness of the incident.

State and federal regulators should seek the maximum penalty as a deterrent against further lax treatment of one of the region's most serious environmental sites.