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Fate of One of California's Most Toxic Sites Lies on USDOJ

LOS ANGELES-- The United States Department of Justice (US DOJ) has taken a major course change, proposing approval of [Exide's bankruptcy plan on behalf of Exide Holdings, Inc.](#), allowing abandonment of the cleanup at the highly contaminated Vernon California site. This would leave the site orphaned, with no functional owner capable of securing it or of completing the cleanup, which is now in mid-stream. The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has previously identified risk of chemical contamination onsite moving offsite, if not removed. The cleanup plan would have prevented this, but now would be abandoned if DOJ finalizes the bankruptcy settlement.

Local environmental justice organization, Communities for A Better Environment (CBE), mobilized a [letter campaign](#) to USDOJ over the weekend after hearing about the shortened public comment deadline. The comment period is closing after just 11 days; a process that can be open for sometimes at least 30 days. As of this morning, 353 people have submitted comment through the link. The asks are simple, extend the comment period, hold a public hearing, and deny the bankruptcy plan so that Exide is accountable for the clean-up.

"We have been fighting for the cleanup of the facility and our homes for many years now and we need Exide to pay for the full cost of the damage they caused in our communities," **said Idalmis Vaquero, CBE member and Boyle Heights Resident.** "Those who have poisoned our communities for over 30 years should not be let off the hook simply because their business model is no longer profitable."

Exide, formerly known as Exide Battery Technologies, is notoriously known for being the site of one of [California's largest toxic site clean-up's in the state's history.](#) The [2015 Draft Environmental Impact Report \(EIR\)](#) described samples documenting high concentrations of lead, arsenic, cadmium, and antimony contamination in soil, dust, and retention pond sediment

onsite, in addition to dioxins, furans, PAHs (Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons), and naphthalene, offsite, such as public sidewalks surrounding Exide.

“Lead is an extremely potent neurotoxin that can cause damage to almost all organs. Lead exposures in communities around Exide remain widespread, and even at low levels can cause cognitive deficits, neurodevelopmental delays and psychological impairments,” **said Jill Johnston, Assistant Professor of Preventive Medicine and Spatial Sciences at the University of Southern California.** “There is no ‘safe’ threshold of childhood lead exposure and without active remediation, this large source of lead will continue to pose a threat to the health of this surrounding communities.”

At an [information briefing](#) on Friday, October 2nd, DTSC said the clean-up of the site, if orphaned, could take over 100 million dollars. DTSC receives money from the state to clean up orphaned sites every year, so this location would be in that list, however, that budget was cut meaning there is no money for orphaned site clean-ups. They also provided a timeline on how the filing process began and what is to come; USDOJ is set to decide on October 15th.

“Communities surrounding the Exide Technologies facility in Vernon have borne the brunt of the company’s negligence for over 30 years. The cleanup of Vernon Exide site is a major public health concern and we ask the DOJ to help protect the residents impacted by the pollution created by Exide Holdings, Inc.,” **said Jennifer Ganata, Senior Staff Attorney at Communities for A Better Environment.** “Surrounding environmental justice communities deserve accountability from a large corporation like Exide and have the right to live without the fear of being poisoned by toxins released from negligent industrial processes.”

Founded in 1978, **Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)** is one of the preeminent environmental justice organizations in the nation. The mission of CBE is to build people’s power in California’s communities of color and low-income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy and sustainable communities and environments.

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