

NPL Site Narrative for Kaiser Steel Corp.(Fontana Plant)

KAISER STEEL CORP. (FONTANA PLANT) Fontana, California

Federal Register Notice: [June 24, 1988](#)

Conditions at proposal (June 24, 1988): Kaiser Steel Corp.'s former plant occupies about 2,000 acres in Fontana, San Bernardino County, California. The plant operated during 1942-83. In February 1987, Kaiser filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the Federal bankruptcy code.

The plant consisted of three main units: a primary production unit, a rolling mill, and two slag disposal areas covering approximately 1 square mile. California Steel Industries, Inc., purchased the rolling mill from Kaiser in 1984. Cuyahoga Wrecking Corp. purchased the coke plant and blast furnaces in the primary production unit for salvage and began dismantling them in 1985. Tanks and structures were cut open with blow torches, spilling contents onto the ground and starting fires. Asbestos insulation was torn or knocked off, releasing fibers to the environment. EPA pursued a criminal case against Cuyahoga; in December 1988, Cuyahoga officials were found guilty on seven counts of Clean Air Act violations, and received prison sentences of up to 1.5 years.

A consultant to Kaiser has identified 28 potentially contaminated source areas throughout the former plant. Hazardous substances on-site include PCBs, coal tar sludge,

plating sludges, acids, asbestos, and heavy metals. Photographs taken during a 1986 inspection show waste and wreckage scattered about the site, numerous drums and sumps in poorly maintained condition, and visibly contaminated soil. The plant is being dismantled for the planned development of an industrial park; a considerable amount of wreckage appears to have been removed.

A 1985 study by Kaiser consultants showed elevated levels of benzene, methylene chloride, and total dissolved solids in on-site wells. The water table below the site, now approximately 350 feet, is expected to rise in the future with implementation of a regional ground water storage program in Chino Basin. Three of the main drinking water wells of the City of Ontario are 1-2 miles directly downgradient of the Kaiser plant. An estimated 150,000 people obtain drinking water from municipal wells within 3 miles of the site.

The facility acquired Interim Status under Subtitle C of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) when it filed a Notification of Hazardous Waste Activity and Part A of a permit application. The site is being proposed for the NPL because it satisfies a component of EPA's NPL/RCRA policy: the owner has demonstrated an inability to finance appropriate remedial action by invoking bankruptcy laws.

Status (October 4, 1989): EPA has dropped this site from the proposed NPL. Kaiser emerged from bankruptcy in September 1988. Hence, this site no longer satisfies the NPL/RCRA policy.

Kaiser is under a Consent Order from the California Department of Health Services and a Cleanup and Abatement Order from the California Regional Water Quality Control Board. EPA has referred the site to the State Superfund program.

EPA tests conducted in 1988 detected heavy metals in the atmosphere at the disposal piles and in ground water. The levels of barium, chromium, cadmium, lead, and mercury in ground water equal or exceed Federal primary drinking water standards. The highest concentrations are in wells near the

chrome and ferrous chloride (pickle liquor) ponds. The ponds are known to have had two leaks, resulting in a total loss of 1.5 million gallons of hydrochloric acid solution.

[The description of the site (release) is based on information available at the time the site was evaluated with the HRS. The description may change as additional information is gathered on the sources and extent of contamination. See [56 FR 5600](#), February 11, 1991, or subsequent FR notices.]