

**CWA INSPECTION REPORT  
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 5**

Purpose

Wastewater Treatment Plant Reconnaissance Inspection

Facility

East Chicago Sanitary District  
5200 Indianapolis Boulevard  
East Chicago, IN 46312

Date of Inspection

January 25, 2023

Facility Representatives


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Hope Hanford, Pretreatment Coordinator


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## **SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to respond to and investigate a citizen complaint regarding the East Chicago Sanitary District's (ECSD's) wastewater treatment plant (WWTP), located at 5200 Indianapolis Boulevard, East Chicago, Indiana.

On January 25, 2024, IDEM conducted a reconnaissance inspection at ECSD to (1) evaluate the compliance status of ECSD's WWTP, and (2) investigate an odor complaint made by a former ECSD employee. IDEM invited EPA to join the inspection, and EPA accepted the invitation.

## **SECTION 2.0: BACKGROUND**

ECSD is a publicly-owned treatment works located in East Chicago, Indiana. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) issued NPDES Permit No. IN0022829 to ECSD. The effective and expiration dates of the permit are July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2026, respectively.

In December 2023, a citizen reached out to IDEM, stating that he noticed a strong petroleum odor in the filter building of the WWTP. The citizen said that he noticed the odor about three or four times in the past couple of months, on weekends.

## **SECTION 3.0: INSPECTION ACTIVITY SUMMARY**

### **A. Opening Interview:**

Mr. Ellens arrived at 5200 Indianapolis Boulevard, East Chicago, IN 46312 at 9:10 a.m., and met Ms. Spratt and Mr. Ream in the parking lot. The EPA and IDEM inspectors (inspection team) entered the ECSD facility and met with Kenneth Myers (Director of Wastewater Operations).

Mr. Myers led the IDEM and EPA inspectors to his office. The inspection team then asked Mr. Myers about the citizen complaint. Following is a summary of ECSD's statements:

- About one month before the inspection:
  - ECSD staff received a discharge that had an adverse effect on its biological treatment system.
  - ECSD staff tried to track down the source of the discharge. They tracked the discharge to the Alder Lift Station but were not able to track it from there.
- On December 19, 2023:
  - Safety-Kleen accidentally discharged a tank of bleach to the sewer.
  - The discharge triggered alarms at ECSD's Canal Pump Station.
- Two nights before the inspection (the night of January 23, 2024), ECSD staff were repairing a leak at ECSD's Alder Lift Station. While they were working, they noticed a petroleum odor.
- Yesterday (on January 24, 2024):
  - ECSD staff noticed an oily sheen at the WWTP. Staff tracked the sheen back to ECSD's Canal Lift Station.
  - Safety-Kleen is one of the industrial users (IUs) whose discharge runs through the Canal Lift Station.
  - ECSD's staff noticed a biological, sulfur-like, petroleum odor at the Safety-Kleen sewer outfall (Outfall 901).

- ECSD staff started collecting samples for analysis at Outfall 901.
- There were two feet of standing water at Safety-Kleen’s “Plant 1.” Safety-Kleen stated that the water came from freezing issues.
- Safety Kleen plans to pump excess water to the ECSD WWTP.
- ECSD initiated sampling for both local limit and categorical pollutant parameters during their visit. ECSD plans to pick up completed composite samples from Safety-Kleen on the afternoon of the inspection.

**B. Facility Tour:**

After the interview, Mr. Myers led the inspection team on a facility tour. Before the facility tour, the inspection team briefly met Henry Padillia. Mr. Padillia showed the inspection team a sample bottle, containing some of a discharge recently collected from Safety-Kleen’s Outfall 901. The sample was dark and murky.

During the facility tour, the inspection team met Tom Lentz, (Chief Operator, Manager of Wastewater Operations) and Lalo Peña, Treatment Plant Operator. They stated the following:

- The mixed liquor suspended solids (MLSS) levels ranged from 3,740 to 6,040 milligrams per liter from December 25 to 29, 2023.
- The average MLSS level is 5,944 mg/l (for January 1 to 16, 2023).
- A MLSS of 5,000 mg/l is optimal.
- Sometime Tuesday night (January 23, 2025), there was a noticeable petroleum odor in the pump room.

During the facility tour, Mr. Meyers showed the inspection team the following:

- Oxidation ditch;
  - The inspection team noticed a petroleum odor;
- Parshall flume;
  - The WWTP flow rate was 15.5 million gallons per day (MGD) at the time;
  - The inspection team noticed a petroleum odor and saw an oily sheen on the wastewater’s surface;
- Five secondary clarifiers;
  - The inspection team noticed a petroleum odor, saw an oily sheen on wastewater in the influent channel, and saw a sheen on the wastewater in Clarifier #1;
- Filter building
  - The inspection team noticed a petroleum odor and noticed a film on the wastewater on top of filters;
- Aeration channel; and
- Outfall
  - The inspection team noticed an oily sheen on the water in the Grand Calumet River, near the outfall.

**C. Closing Conference:**

At the end of the WWTP tour, Mr. Ream stated that ECSD will get an unsatisfactory rating, because of the oily sheen we saw in the Grand Calumet River, near ECSD’s outfall. Mr. Ream requested ECSD to place oil booms in the river, to contain the oil sheen.

Mr. Ream requested ECSD's fats, oils, and grease (FOG) influent data. However, after checking, Mr. Myers replied that ECSD is not required to maintain FOG influent data.

Ms. Hanford stated that a clarifier pump at Safety-Kleen was broken. The inspection team subsequently decided to conduct an inspection at Safety-Kleen.

The inspection team left the ECSD facility at 11:25 a.m.