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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

EDITORIALS

Ready Or Not, Here Comes The EPA

In a good-news, bad-news story, the Environmental Protection Agency has announced a major investigation of discharges into the Mississippi River at Sauget. That the agency is undertaking such an activity is good; that it announces it with such fanfare makes it almost pointless.

When the Beluga, the research vessel belonging to the environmental group Greenpeace, passed through the St. Louis area last month, it took samples of the discharges at Sauget. But it compared those samples, taken in September, against samples it had made, unannounced, earlier in the summer. The earlier tests showed much higher levels of pollutants than did the ones made when the plants knew Greenpeace researchers were in the area. Maybe the differences can be innocently explained. Then again, maybe not.

In any event, one can only wonder what in the world prompted EPA officials to give more than fair warning to the polluters that it would be dropping by. The law doesn't require this; the most basic horse sense dictates against it. The parties that discharge wastes into the Mississippi — or any body of water — have some ability to regulate that discharge. Wastes that might cause the discharge to exceed federal pollution standards can be held on site until the EPA marauders pass.

It's enough to strike terror in the heart of only the most stupid. Small wonder the EPA reports the companies it intends to visit have been "very cooperative." The action is good for getting headlines on the eve of the presidential election, but so far as helping gain an understanding of the sort of pollution dumped into our rivers every day, it's a doubtful exercise.

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