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June 22, 2006

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Steelworkers Demand Compliance and Appropriate Penalties at Gerdau AmeriSteel's Jackson, Tenn., Facility

Pittsburgh - The United Steelworkers (USW) today called on the State of Tennessee to set a hearing to enforce a previously issued Order to Gerdau AmeriSteel for alleged violations of the Clean Air Act and to levy appropriate fines for high priority violations that occurred between the years 2000-2004. The Union also requested that the [Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation](#) (TDEC) promptly issue for public review a draft operating permit renewal that includes an enforceable compliance schedule.

In a letter to Barry R. Stephens, Director of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, [USW District 9 Director Connie Entrekin](#) wrote, "USW recognizes that the environment is an essential issue...and protecting the environment ultimately means more efficient production, with less drain on the earth's resources, and less waste."

USW research reveals that Gerdau AmeriSteel has released 310,461 pounds of toxic metals to the community's air between the years of 2000-2004, including nearly 15 tons (29,960 pounds) of lead. According to the federal Toxic Release Inventory, the facility released over 96 percent of Madison County's industrial lead emissions. Lead is associated with serious health effects, especially in young children and the unborn. In 2004, the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) deemed inorganic lead a probable carcinogen.

Gerdau's environmental policy, found on its web site, claims to "manage [its] activities...to protect the atmosphere, water and soil;" however, it continues to emit a significant amount of toxic pollutants to the surrounding community.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) warns that "everyday low-level exposure to [lead] render [the public] vulnerable to chronic lead poisoning, even while it spares them the full horrors of acute lead poisoning."

Childhood lead poisoning should be a major concern for the Jackson community since health damage can occur with no immediate physical symptoms. It can cause brain damage, birth defect, developmental and behavioral problems, and damage to the kidneys and central nervous system. All lead exposure must be closely monitored because it does not break down in the environment. Therefore, both past and present sources of lead pose health risks.

Recently, the Gerdau Jackson Facility has been a target of investigation by the USW. With

Gerdau in position to renew their Title V operating permit, the USW raises speculation as to Gerdau's qualifications for such a permit. USW believes the permit should be held under scrutiny from both the government and the community.

More questions arise from an examination of Gerdau's fines from TDEC. The Gerdau Jackson Facility was listed as having "High Priority Violations," but the company was fined only a modest penalty of \$10,000—a number that USW believes does not reflect the gravity of its environmental violations.

Along with questionable fines, Gerdau faces alleged recordkeeping violations in its Semiannual Report submissions. It appears that the company concealed information from state officials, attempting to skirt the goals of the Clean Air Act.

In his letter, Entrekin said that in the USW's experience nationwide, "the worst violators of labor laws and human rights standards invariably are the worst polluters and violators of environmental regulations." Exemplifying their commitment to rectifying severe environmental violations, Entrekin states that the USW "intends to hold Gerdau accountable by continuing to closely scrutinize Gerdau Jackson Facility operations."

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