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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: July 7, 2004

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TDEC LAX ON ENFORCEMENT AGAINST SMOKEY MOUNTAIN SMELTERS HAZARDOUS WASTE SITE

KNOXVILLE –

Tennessee Clean Water Network (TCWN) and Tennessee Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) have released the first in a series of three reports highlighting water pollution enforcement issues in Tennessee. The first case study focuses on the pollution of a tributary of the Tennessee River in South Knoxville. The source of this pollution is an abandoned hazardous waste facility, Smokey Mountain Smelters, which has been discharging pollutants into surface waters for many years without a permit or any form of treatment or containment.

“What is most frustrating about this situation is that the Department of Environment and Conservation has been aware of this pollution for years,” said Kim Ransom, Programs Director for TCWN. “They have received complaints from citizens and have collected water samples indicating a number of pollutants and hazardous substances, but have taken no action to issue the appropriate permits or begin cleanup of the site.”

The Smokey Mountain Smelters site is located in Knox County, Tennessee, on Maryville Pike, slightly beyond the city limits of Knoxville. The smelter is no longer in operation and the site is currently abandoned and unused. Large piles of waste are found on the surface of the ground, consisting of what is believed to be a mixture of waste by-products from secondary aluminum smelting and casting. Contaminated seepage and surface drainage from the site enter a nearby unnamed tributary of Flenniken Branch, which flows to the Knob Creek embayment of the Fort Loudon Reservoir, and then to the Tennessee River.

The site was used as an illegal dumpsite for many years, operating without the necessary permits for waste disposal and water pollution discharges. On at least three separate occasions, water samples were taken by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), in which they found contaminants harmful to human health and the environment, including heavy metals, organic chemicals, and radioactive pollutants.

Although the discharge of pollutants to the waters of the state without a permit is a clear violation of state and federal laws, TDEC has failed to issue the required permits or take the necessary steps to control the discharge of pollution from the site.

“This is an example of numerous waste dumps around the state that are not properly controlled and do not have the required water discharge permits per the federal regulations,” said Barry Sulkin, Director of Tennessee PEER and former Chief of Enforcement for Tennessee Division of Water Pollution Control.

TCWN and TN PEER have filed a complaint with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, pursuant to the Tennessee Water Quality Control Act and the Hazardous Waste Management Act, requesting that the State of Tennessee take immediate action to issue the appropriate water pollution permits to the responsible party and to begin clean up and removal of waste. The agency must respond to the complaint within 90 days.

To obtain a copy of the report, please contact TCWN at 865-522-7007.

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