

Dow's Toxic Legacy Of EPA Corruption

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By [Brad](#) on May 2nd, 2008 at 1:59 pm

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The investigation into the [firing of Environmental Protection Agency regional administrator Mary Gade](#) has just begun. But this is not the first EPA scandal involving Dow Chemical's plant in Midland, Michigan. In 1983, a dioxin-laced scandal involving the very same plant led to a dramatic shakeup of Reagan's EPA, when Mary Gade was a young staffer at the agency.



As the *New York Times* reported in an [April 19, 1983 story](#), Dow Chemical's illegal attempts to avoid responsibility for its dioxin contamination began as far back as 1965:

Almost 20 years ago, scientists from four rival chemical companies attended a closed meeting at the Dow Chemical Company's headquarters. The subject was the health hazards of dioxin, a toxic contaminant found in a widely used herbicide that the companies manufactured.

Shortly after the meeting, in Midland, Mich., on March 24, 1965, one of those attending wrote in a memorandum that **Dow did not want its findings about dioxin made public because the situation might "explode"** and generate a new wave of government regulation for the chemical industry.

The "new wave" of regulations did come to pass, with the Environmental Protection Agency established in 1970 to [enforce those laws](#). However, under President Ronald Reagan, the Environmental Protection Agency colluded with Dow Chemical to hide its responsibility for dioxin contamination:

Three weeks ago, for example, agency officials in Chicago told the Investigations Subcommittee of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce that their superiors in Washington ordered them to change an important report on dioxin to comply with the wishes of Dow.

The key deletion from the report was the following central conclusion about Dow's

Midland plant: "Dow's discharge represented the major source, if not the only source, of TCDD contamination found in the Tittabawassee and Saginaw Rivers and Saginaw Bay in Michigan."

The Reagan administration doggedly attempted to cover up the scandal. As Maureen Dowd reported in Time Magazine in March 1983, President Reagan "tried to down-play the problems, [blaming the press for exaggerating the story](#)." However, a congressional investigation exposed the extent of Dow Chemical's influence over the EPA, leading to the dismissal of EPA Administrator Anne McGill Burford and 12 other officials:

Anne McGill Burford, for example, made at least two trips to Midland, Mich., in her 22 months as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Rita M. Lavelle, the former head of the Government program to clean up toxic waste dumps, met at least 14 times with Dow officials in the 11 months she held office.

Mrs. Burford, Miss Lavelle and 11 other political appointees recently resigned or were dismissed amid Congressional inquiries on allegations that the agency's toxic waste program had been mishandled.

Like the [dioxins still contaminating the waters of Saginaw Bay](#), it appears that Dow Chemical's toxic influence over the Environmental Protection Agency continues to this very day.

(HT: Dave Dempsey, the [Great Lakes Blogger](#) and prominent Michigan [environmentalist](#).)

UPDATE: As Michael Hawthorne [reports in the Chicago Tribune](#), Dow Chemical and the business lobby are still fighting the public relations war:

"There is all of this mystique about dioxin," said John Musser, a Dow spokesman. "Just because it's there doesn't mean there is an imminent health threat." [...]

Bob VanDeventer, president of the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce, said local leaders are trying to fight the perception that dioxin makes the area unsafe. He argued "[not one illness](#)" can be attributed to dioxin and insisted the only way someone could be exposed to dioxin is if they "[eat the dirt](#)."

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