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Foundry cleans up its act with new system

Atlantic States to cut mercury emissions.

By TOM QUIGLEY The Express-Times

PHILLIPSBURG

PHILLIPSBURG - It will be a cold day in Phillipsburg when area residents are able to see that familiar stream of steam rising above Atlantic States Cast Iron and Pipe Co., according to plans announced Wednesday.

"For the first time in 150 years, there won't be a steam plume coming from Atlantic States," plant manager Mitchell Kidd said.

Only on extremely cold days will the emissions be visible.

A new air-emissions system will virtually eliminate the plume and, more importantly, reduce mercury emissions, state environmental officials and plant managers said.

The new system, hailed as state of the art by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection officials, is slated to begin operating in January.

"I think Atlantic States needs to be commended," DEP Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell said as he and other environmental officials joined company leaders at the Sitgreaves Street plant to officially announce the new emissions system.

Campbell described Atlantic States as "a worldwide leader in moving ahead on the technology that will reduce mercury emissions."

The commissioner said Atlantic States is the only foundry in North America using the new system designed to trap mercury and other chemicals using a bag house where the pollutants are trapped by an activated carbon mixture.

Installation of the \$9.3 million system is part of a settlement reached between the DEP and Atlantic States following a series of air-emissions violations that occurred at the plant in recent years.

Most of those violations have been rectified, and the new air-emissions system goes beyond what DEP could require of the plant, Campbell said.

He said the plant volunteered to install the emissions system, adding that he hopes other foundries will follow the example.

The foundry employs 300 workers and manufactures large iron pipes primarily used for underground water systems. It is a division of McWane Inc.

The majority of workers at the plant belong to the United Steelworkers Local No. 9404.

Stephen Wayda, the union's president, said the company's investment in the multi-million-dollar emissions system bodes well for workers. He said it shows the company will be around for a long time.

McWane President and Chief Executive Officer G. Ruffner Page Jr. said Wednesday the company is here to stay.

Page said installing the new system was done because it is "the right thing to do."

Campbell said the foundry will be four years ahead of mercury emissions standards set to take effect in 2010. Company officials said the new emissions system will also reduce carbon monoxide emissions by 60 percent, reduce noise levels at the plant and reduce energy costs.