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## Rockwool: Pican, Croatia



PC: *IndyMedia UK.*

Rockwool has 45 manufacturing facilities across the world. One location, Rockwool Adriatic, purchased land from the Croatian government in October 2005. Initially, residents were misinformed and were told that a blanket making factory would be built at the site. Residents would later find out that the factory would be used to produce stone wool insulation. An agreement allowed them to avoid paying income taxes for ten years and stated that if normal production is prevented for any reason, they would be guaranteed compensation of 10,000 euros/month.

The factory was built at the top of a large peninsula called Istria in the middle of

an agricultural area that also served as protected national water reserves and the only source of drinking water in the area. The area lacks proper air circulation, since it is in a valley surrounded by hills. Problems began to arise during construction since the factory was being built on top of abandoned coal mines. Due to the ground underneath the factory being unstable, the smokestack couldn't be built as high as it needed to be. The smokestack was built only 70 meters high even though it needed to be at least 270 m. This is because the hills surrounding the region range from 300 - 1400 m, while the town is at sea level. This combined with the lack of proper air circulation has resulted in pollution encasing the valley. Residents have complained about not being able to leave their houses before noon, because of the intense amount of smoke and pollution hanging over the valley.



*Pollution filling the valley in Pican, Croatia.*

As the factory was being built, thousands of residents in the municipality of Pican began protesting and several environmental associations joined the fight. Several complaints were filed against Rockwool in 2007, but ended up failing in the lower courts. The complaints included breaking the Waste Management Law for improper disposal of waste, using the emergency chimney, and emitting SO<sub>2</sub> and ammonium pollutants into the air above the limits allowed by Croatian and EU laws.



Residents protesting the factory in 2009.

The local government also opposed the project and refused to build a 400-meter long access road in the Pićan Industrial Zone, stating that Rockwool was destroying people's health. However, the state stepped in, and after seven years, the project was completed. The municipal councilor, Božena Sucić Jurčić, stated in a 2012 interview that "Pićan is covered in soot these days... This factory was built in the wrong place, in the valley. Our roofs are full of stone wool, which was also found in water samples. People started getting sick, and I have health problems, my eyes and throat itch. They themselves admit to releasing formaldehyde that destroys a man's DNA. Believe me, the municipality would be happy to give up these two million kuna of annual income just to stay healthy."



[HB 4553](#), which amends zoning requirements for large-scale solar facilities, was introduced in the state's legislative session on February 3rd. This bill would allow exempt wholesale generators to be permitted use in any zoning district anywhere in West Virginia. If passed, this bill will override local zoning ordinances within county jurisdiction. We encourage you to email or call your Delegates, urging them to vote against HB 4553. Each county should be able to decide where renewable energy facilities - that require hundreds of acres for development - are appropriate to locate in their communities. We have included a draft letter below that you can customize and submit. [Find contact information for your legislators.](#)

### Take Action Now & Contact Your Legislators

Due to lack of funding, the WVDEP Office of Oil and Gas (OOG) has been forced to severely reduce its staff. The OOG currently has limited staffing of only nine inspectors to oversee approximately 75,000 wells and 28,000 tanks across the state. There were two bills introduced that provide a solution to add resources to address this problem, [SB 480](#) and [HB 2725](#). [Read West Virginia Rivers Coalition's fact sheet on the bills.](#) The West Virginia Rivers Coalition created a letter that you can send to your legislators, urging them to ensure that the WVDEP has adequate inspectors to protect our water.

### Take Action Now & Contact Your Legislators

Several bills have been introduced to rollback protections under the Aboveground Storage Tank Act. On February 8th, the House Energy and Manufacturing Committee introduced a substitute version that makes changes to which tanks would be exempt. Under this version, oil and gas tanks closest to drinking water intakes would not be exempted completely. However, the bill weakens inspection requirements for these storage tanks containing harmful pollutants located closest to our public drinking water intakes. The bill bypassed the Health and Human Resources Committee and is headed directly to the House floor for a vote.



SB 279, the WVDEP rules bundle that sought to weaken the human health criteria on our water quality standards that protect our health from dangerous pollutants, including known carcinogenic toxins was approved by the House on February 11th in a 72- 22 vote. The bill creates a loophole which allows industries to dump more toxins in our source water. The vote came after Delegates Chad Lovejoy and Mike Pushkin both introduced amendments that would have strengthened the rules. Unfortunately, the amendments failed.

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Attending local government meetings is another important way you can be active in the community. Your presence helps to hold our officials accountable to the values and concerns of Jefferson County's citizens. "Think global, act local!"

### View This Week's Meetings

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