

Dear Friends of Cayuga Lake,

April 20, 2020

We hope you are well given the State of Emergency and rapid changes in our daily lives. This crisis is bringing into sharp focus how much we depend on one another to act for a greater common good. Even as we practice social distancing, we must come together to work through this crisis. The Covid19 pandemic is changing everything about the way our society, economy and democracy works. All of us are having to change the way we live and work. Much like the climate crisis, this pandemic requires strong, early actions to make things better. The collective response to this virus shows how quickly and resolutely countries and people can act if called upon to do so.

Interestingly, this resultant downturn in economic activity has had positive effects on the environment. Satellite images have shown a large drop in air pollution ([as you can see here for the Lower 48 and for Eastern China](#)) specifically nitrogen dioxide, a gas mainly emitted by cars, trucks, power plants and some factories. Water clarity has drastically improved in many areas as well. Air pollution that had nearly vanished over China as the country was in COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown, is now returning as business resumes.

On the other hand, the EPA is further relaxing environmental restrictions on industry. And, here in central New York, Cargill Deicing has ignored the Governor's orders for non-essential businesses to close, whereas American Rock Salt's road salt mine in Livingston County has been closed since March 18th in order to promote the safety of their workers, their workers' families and the broader community.

Cargill is mining and shipping road salt for next winter as well as reaming a new shaft. You can see our letters to Plant Manager Shawn Wilczynski as well as Cargill's reply at our web site ([here](#)). Classifying salt extraction as "essential business" is an example of putting Cargill's interests ahead of community safety. Our attorney, Serenna McCloud, forwarded our letters and a formal complaint to the NYS Attorney General's office. They called to ask

her if the mine was still open, but then nothing happened.

We thus are calling on local residents to join in asking Cargill to close their non-essential road salt mine at Portland Point unless the Governor permits non-essential business to reopen. When social distancing has a direct effect on the rate of Covid-19 infections in 2-3 days' time, how can producing road salt for next winter possibly be deemed to be "essential business"?

In their reply to CLEAN's first letter, Cargill attorney Kevin Roe writes, "Cargill [is] requiring all employees who can work at home to do so." And, "Cargill is also following CDC guidelines for prevention of transmission of the virus, including social distancing and daily sanitation of human traffic areas and touch points."

Despite, these assurances, how can Cargill be implementing effective social distancing during the six-minute hoist ride down into the mine? Compared to American Rock Salt's hoist cage which can accommodate 60 workers, Cargill's hoist in their Shaft 3 reportedly only accommodates 18 in normal times. Why has the newer, safer, more efficient, locally-owned salt mine shut down while the older, less-safe mine not shut down?[\[1\]](#) Cargill appears to be putting profits ahead of worker and community safety.

It also seems that relatively few of Cargill's approximately 188 employees at Portland Point are office staff or executives who can work from home. The vehicle count during the day in the employee parking lots was about 88 on April 8, and about 93 on April 17 and dropping to less than half that on the other two shifts.

The day-time vehicle count has included vehicles belonging to consultants such as Syracuse Utilities, Milton Caterpillar, Fire Suppression Systems, Miller Drilling, and Friedman Electric. Cargill cannot be expected to train and rigorously monitor all of its many consultants. As a case in point, the Mine Health and Safety Administration imposed the largest fine at the mine in the past two years on a Cargill contractor for violating dust control and air quality

standards. On days when the weigh station is open and transport contractors are picking up salt, there is a steady stream of tractor trailer rigs moving into and off of the facility. By staying open during the peak of the pandemic in New York State, Cargill is drawing numerous other companies and their employees into its non-essential work.

A [Harvard study](#) indicates that people living and working environments with high particulate matter levels (PM 2.5) are much more susceptible to Covid-19. And yet, on numerous observation visits to observe above-ground operations at Cayuga Salt Mine, CLEAN has yet to observe a single person wearing a dust mask. And this is despite the Covid-19 outbreak and despite frontend loader and dump truck operators working in dusty conditions at and near the bulk salt storage pads.

So, to sum up, there is no good reason for why Cargill should still be mining and processing road salt during the Covid-19 emergency. Cargill's competitor, American Rock Salt shut down the mining of road salt on 18 March, but Cargill—as owner of the less efficient, less safe road salt mine--appears to be trying to regain some of the road salt market share that it has lost to American Rock Salt during the past 18 years.

Please call or write Shawn Wilczynski (Shawn_Wilczynski@cargill.com), Dave Plumeau (Dave_Plumeau@cargill.com), Bill Gracon (Bill_Gracon@cargill.com), and other executives at Cargill Deicing in Lansing ([\(607\) 533-4221](tel:6075334221)) and ask them to shut down salt mining, processing and shipping until the Governor has announced that non-essential work can legally resume in New York State. The lives of Cargill employees and of all the other citizens of central New York are more important than Cargill profits.

[1] ARS has had zero fatalities since opening their mine in about 2002, whereas Cargill has had six fatalities since purchasing Cayuga Salt Mine in 1970.

Clean the Lake.
Protect the Lake.

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