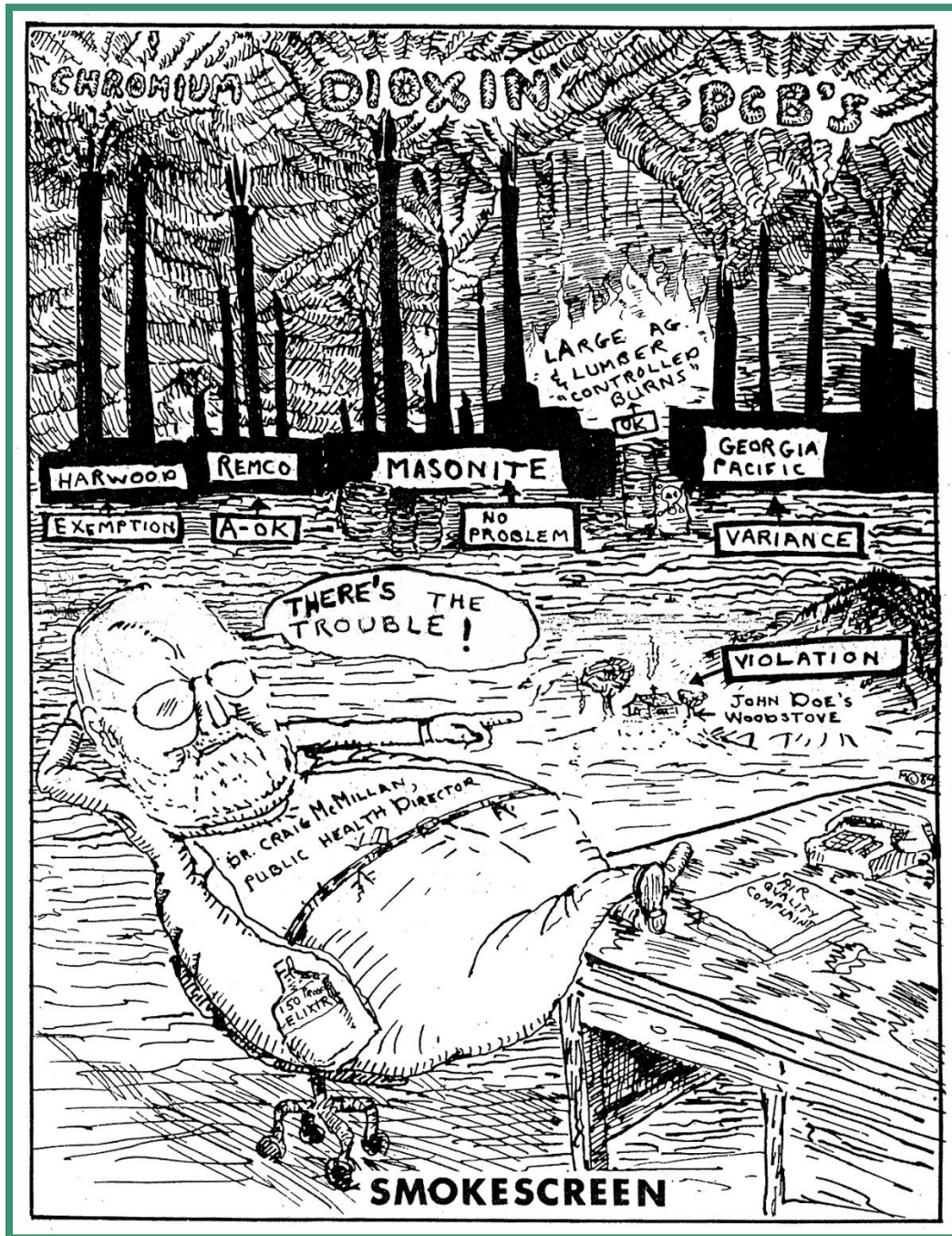


Chapter 14 : Mother Jones at the Georgia Pacific Mill



“Greed is a noble motivator, when applied in the right context.”

—T Marshall Hahn, President, Georgia-Pacific, 1983-93

At least the workers at the *Georgia-Pacific* Mill in Fort Bragg had a union who would protect their jobs and working conditions—or so they thought.

The lumber mill that adorned the California coast in Fort Bragg was the largest employer in town, a town whose economy depended on timber. The mill employed more than 600 workers whose wages began at around \$7 per hour and ranged up to \$18 for long-time veterans. Remote from any major highways or rail lines, and lacking a deep water port, the only other industries of any significance in that area were fishing and tourism (though the wine trade was just beginning to gain some pertinence as well).¹ The large mill had been owned by the Union Lumber Company until it was purchased by Boise-Cascade (B-C) in 1969, at which point, IWA Local 3-469 unionized the workers. B-C suffered financial difficulties and subsequently their California holdings were purchased by Georgia-Pacific (G-P) in 1973, in a hostile takeover. B-C filed a successful anti-trust suit against G-P, which had to spin off another company (which became Louisiana-Pacific) to comply with the terms.² G-P retained ownership of the Fort Bragg facility. Mendocino County environmentalists had tangled with Georgia-Pacific for many years—most notably over the expansion of the Sinkyone wilderness. Though not actually a company town like Scotia, Fort Bragg was essentially a company town in practice, and that would be proven for all to see. G-P Mill workers were still reeling from their concessionary contract in 1985 and from the loss of their union loggers in the woods—who had been replaced by Gyppo logging crews—when an incident happened on February 11, 1989 that would further expose what went on behind the Redwood Curtain.

Timber mills, even unionized mills, are dangerous places, approaching conditions not unlike those in the meat packing plants described in Upton Sinclair's classic, *The Jungle*. For years, North Coast timber, pulp, and paper mill workers had complained about dangerous conditions and toxic chemicals used in mill machinery and processing applications, and management's lax safety standards. For example, in 1982, Michael Welch, an employee at McNamara and Peepe's Arcata mill was instructed to work with lumber being dipped in Pentachlorophenol (PCP)—an anti-fungicidal agent used to prevent discoloration of

the wood. No safety equipment was available, and when Welch questioned his supervisors, he was told, "this stuff is completely safe; you could bathe in it." However, OSHA had already stated otherwise, because, not unlike Garlon, this chemical was closely related to Agent Orange, and its effects were similar. Welch had noticed that safety warnings specifically meant to warn workers about the dangers of this particular chemical had been removed, without any explanation. Welch refused to do the work, but he was the exception, rather than the rule, and PCP was used in hundreds of mills throughout the industry at the time.³

Two years later, Simpson announced that they would be using tetrachlorophenol (TCP) at its facility in Korbel. The workers, represented by IWA Local #3-98 opposed Simpson's plans, even threatening to strike over the issue at one point. Simpson negotiated a settlement, promising to use a failsafe device on the company's waterlines to prevent contamination (which was never done). Less than six months later, in February 1985, these same workers were exposed to fungicide Busan 1030, a TCP substitute, which had leaked into the company's water supply, and was detected by its odor (TCP itself is odorless). Simpson reacted by laying off the workers and refusing to pay them for lost time, arguing that "just because they promised to install a safety device and then didn't is no reason for them to pay workers for a layoff caused by a company mistake." The company and its hired physician argued that Busan 1030 was "relatively safe," again in spite of well cited contrary evidence.⁴ Indeed, the use of dioxins in paper mills was a common occurrence, and each time the companies that used them insisted they were "perfectly safe."⁵ However, surveys taken throughout the US and Canada already indicated a significant incidence of toxic and even fatal reactions to these chemicals, and in Canada, at least, unions were lobbying to ban these chemicals altogether.⁶

Mill workers were also routinely exposed to asbestos as was the case in the Louisiana-Pacific mill at Samoa. On January 2, 1988, five workers filed suit in Humboldt County Superior Court that they had been injured when the company illegally removed as-

¹ "Becoming a Non-Person in a Company Town", by Bruce Anderson, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, July 26, 1989.

² "Don Nelson: Candidate for Supervisor, 4th District (Mendocino County)", interview by Beth Bosk, *New Settler Interview*, issue #31, May 1988.

³ "Mill Workers Exposed", by Daniel A. Faulk, *Hard Times*, February 1983.

⁴ "Korbel Poisoning: Fallacies", by Daniel A. Faulk, *Country Activist*, March 1985.

⁵ "Dioxin in Paper Mills", by Carol Van Strum, *Country Activist*, February 1987.

⁶ Faulk, February 1983, op. cit.

bestos, without taking proper precautions, during the week of June 22, 1987. They further charged that L-P had foreknowledge of the danger but neglected to warn the affected workers or take reasonable steps to protect them from exposure. There were at least 20 other workers not part of the suit who were similarly exposed. OSHA had already determined that there was no minimum threshold of exposure to asbestos that didn't involve at least some risk of cancer, but L-P disregarded that information. The Corporate Press neglected to cover this news, and they also failed to note that one person who did, Arcata resident Ida Honoroff, was a staunch environmentalist.⁷ However, such an example did not conveniently fit into the stereotype of “unwashed-out-of-town-jobless-hippies-on-drugs,” so they ignored it.

* * * * *

The Georgia Pacific Mill cogenerated its own power with a machine known as a “hog”, which converted wood debris from the milling operations into heat for a furnace that generated steam which in turn generated electricity which powered the mill. If the hog failed, the mill would come to a halt until it was repaired.⁸ On the morning of Saturday, February 11, 1989, several workers reported the presence of oil on a pump near the hog to head millwright, Frank Murray, although other workers later reported that oil had been seen near that location for a few days previously. Murray was summoned in case the pump in question was failing. Millwrights function as triage mechanics, fixing machinery in the production oriented, profit driven mills on the fly if necessary, and Murray was proficient in this task. Accompanied by mill electrician Ron Atkinson, Murray went to investigate and found oil all over the floor near the pump.⁹

As he was examining the device, a metal capacitor box located several feet above his head—which was the actual source of the leak—burst open, drenching him in a chemical shower. Startled by the initial drops, Murray looked up and swallowed nearly a gallon of the liquid as it cascaded down on to him. Apparently the capacitor, which was used to start the

hog motor, had been leaking for some time, as much as an hour before being finally checked, and as luck would have it, burst at the exact moment when Murray stood beneath it. He began gagging, and—being a middle aged man with dentures—spit out his false teeth. Murray was temporarily blinded, but soon noticed tags near the burst housing warning of PCBs once he regained his sight.¹⁰

Murray was in agony, but his anger exceeded his pain, and he confronted the on duty G-P safety director, Ron Venett, who had been called to the site of the incident, which had also been witnessed by Atkinson. Venett denied that the oil contained PCBs, and he and Murray proceeded to argue about it for several minutes. Atkinson also argued with Venett, then hosed off Murray in one of the plant bathrooms before the latter was taken to the hospital emergency room. Murray told the emergency room staff that he was certain he had ingested PCBs, but the staff responded that the company had already reported that the chemicals were merely mineral oil. The emergency room doctors did not even pump Murray's stomach, even though he arrived at the hospital less than 30 minutes after the accident.¹¹

Meanwhile, as the capacitor continued to leak, more and more of the oil found its way onto the area around the conveyer belt that fed the hog, the nearby machinery, and the sawdust that typically accumulates in the mill. Murray was sent back to work that night, even though he complained of an upset stomach and dry skin, and he and a crew of millwrights welded and cut around the spill for several hours afterwards. They taped a plastic bag under the burst capacitor to collect the still dripping oil. GP's insistence that the oil didn't contain PCBs wasn't convincing any of the workers though, and some electricians even refused to repair the capacitor or even work in the area without protective gear. Nevertheless, at least three shifts of workers came and went and tracked some of the oil into their homes where they exposed their spouses, children, and extended family members to it.¹²

Whether or not Venett was mistaken or deliberately lying, he went to great lengths to hide or destroy the evidence. Some of the oil was apparently cleaned up using paper towels, which were then burned in the hog furnace. Meanwhile, records of the incident, including the details that supported the conclusion that the oil contained PCBs were altered or

⁷ “L-P Workers Exposed to Asbestos”, letter to the editor by Ida Honoroff, *Eureka Times-Standard*, May 27, 1988.

⁸ “Powerhouse Burning Hot”, by Sean Whaley, *Fort Bragg Advocate News*, September 29, 1982. Theoretically, this process could be trumpeted as an example of green biomass electricity generation, though of course, when one factors in the source of the power, clear-cut old-growth forests, all pretensions of green power drop away.

⁹ “At the Mouth of the Hog: Georgia-Pacific Lies About the PCB Spill”, by Mike Koepf, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, March 15, 1989.

¹⁰ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

¹¹ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

¹² Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

conveniently lost. At least one worker contacted the Fort Bragg Police and reported a PCB spill. The Police then contacted the US Coast Guard and the Office of Emergency Services (OES) in Ukiah, who contacted G-P management at the mill. Vennett reported to Greg Smith of the OES that there was no PCB spill, and stated that he would report the same to the other agencies that had been notified. Smith uncritically accepted this report, and no investigators from any of the agency were dispatched to the mill to verify Vennett's claim. Plant Manager Don Whitman backed Vennett's account, which omitted the visual reports by several workers of the yellow warning label on the housing warning of PCBs.¹³

According to G-P records, one of the plant's electricians, John Bucholz, supervised the cleaning up of all of the remaining oil with absorbent pads, which were then stored in plastic bags, that were in turn placed in the mill's chemical room, which is almost always locked. G-P evidently didn't want these to be inspected, lest the claim about PCBs turned out to be true. Then, on the afternoon of February 13, 1989, according to GP's records, Venett met with Jim Ehlers of the Mendocino County Health Department, and again claimed that the oil contained no PCBs. Ehlers took Venett at his word, and like Smith, also didn't investigate the matter independently, and praised Venett for the cleanup job. Even then, the plastic bag and the yellow warning label were still clearly visible on the housing of the burst capacitor.¹⁴

* * * * *

Hog tender Treva Vandenbosch, a G-P employee of eight years, whose workweek began on Mondays, noticed the plastic bag and the oil after wiping off a gage for the oil pump, however, and stood up on the Hog conveyor belt to get a closer look.¹⁵ There she noticed the yellow warning label, and instantly contacted the IWA Local #3-469 safety representative, and requested that he ask G-P if the capacitor did indeed contain PCBs. The company told the safety representative who reported to Vandenbosch that the warning label was incorrect, but she was skeptical, partly because her hands and face had been exposed to the oil and were now burning. During the lunch break, Vandenbosch and a fellow worker examined the burst capacitor once again, took a sample of the oil, and observed

that the bag now had a hole in it through which oil was dripping onto the machinery and plant floor below once again.¹⁶ She then contacted fire department and OSHA, whom she had to call twice before she got an answer.¹⁷

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Vandenbosch, plant manager Whitman, fearing that the situation might unravel further, had asked that Venett request that a lab test a sample of the oil himself, which he did, presumably from the locked cleanup materials. Whitman was being questioned by Frank Murray when the results finally came back, which confirmed that the oil *did* in fact, contain PCBs. On Tuesday, while Vandenbosch was working—with her hands and face still burning where exposed to the oil—the Fire Department arrived, taped off the hog, and instructed everybody to stay out of the area.¹⁸

Vandenbosch again contacted IWA Local #3-469, this time to complain about the situation. That afternoon, she was summoned to the mill by Ron Vennett for a conference and found herself in a captive meeting with five supervisors who proceeded to harass her and berate her, stating that the spill had been contained and that she was beating a dead horse. They drew her a diagram of the spill that was nothing close to the actual situation. Vandenbosch responded by asking them why they hadn't told her and her fellow workers that the oil contained PCBs, why the company had not followed OSHA procedures, and also asked why she alone, among the workers exposed to the oil, was being questioned, to which they responded that they would also question the others later (but never did).¹⁹

Two days after that, acting on information from her fellow workers, Vandenbosch attempted to meet with Don Mobely, a G-P executive who was in town for a meeting to get to the bottom of the situation, but was denied. Refusing to back down, Vandenbosch singlehandedly picketed GP's main offices in Fort Bragg, until the company acquiesced and granted her an audience with Mobely. G-P then contacted ENSCO Environmental Service, a private toxics first responder company based in Fremont, California, who arrived at the mill late Tuesday evening, February 14. ENSCO worked until 6:30 PM the next day. Thursday morning, G-P informed Randy Leach of the Mendocino County Health Department that

¹³ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

¹⁴ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

¹⁵ Anderson, July 26, 1989, op. cit.

¹⁶ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

¹⁷ Anderson, July 26, 1989, op. cit.

¹⁸ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

¹⁹ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

the cleanup was complete, and Leach declared the area safe to enter. ENSCO then contacted G-P announcing that their initial report that their work was done had been in error. The area was then again closed, ENSCO worked until Friday, and this time removed the wooden floor surrounding the affected area, and shipped it to Arkansas to be incinerated. The horse had been anything but dead.²⁰

In spite of the growing body of evidence that something was seriously wrong, G-P management continued to paint Vandenbosch as a loose cannon, and soon many of her fellow workers stopped associating with her. Management accused her of “faking” her ailments, responding, “we’re all going to die (eventually) of one form of cancer or another anyway,” according to Ron Atkinson. Vandenbosch was not satisfied with this response and sought medical attention. She went to the Georgia-Pacific nurse, who referred her to the medical care of her choice, a nurse practitioner, Georgia McClusky, who was a medical professional Vandenbosch had known and trusted for some time.²¹ This time her trust would be betrayed.

McClusky had recently gone to work for Dr. Berenson of the town of Mendocino, who—it turns out—was loyal to Georgia Pacific. McClusky brushed off Vandenbosch’s concerns, responding, “we’ll what did you expect? You’re playing hardball.” Then McClusky suggested that Vandenbosch quit G-P, and although company referrals automatically start workers compensation claims, even if the claim is ultimately determined not to be the company’s responsibility, McClusky requested that Vandenbosch pay for the doctor’s visit. Still not satisfied, she consulted McClusky a second time, expressing anxiety, but McClusky wrote a report stating that Vandenbosch was *not* worried about PCB contamination *in complete contradiction* of the latter’s actual emotional state! Upon returning to work, Vandenbosch’s coworkers shunned her; one accused her of trying to shut the mill down completely. She received hang-up calls late at night, and after much frustration and anxiety, ultimately took McClusky’s advice and resigned, and, after several months and numerous appeals, she finally received workers compensation, but no assurances that she wasn’t still in danger from exposure to PCB’s.²²

* * * * *

To the local media, the spill was a nonissue. The *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*²³ and *Fort Bragg Advocate-News*²⁴ covered it initially, and the reporting was woefully inadequate. The mainstream news would only report that G-P public relations spokesman Don Perry described the incident as “unfortunate,” and added, “According to our records there was no way we could have known PCBs were at that site.” It also reported that IWA Local #3-469 Union Representative Don Nelson believed that the company had made a “real effort” to phase out PCB-laden equipment in the mill.²⁵ Nelson even went so far as to downplay the entire affair on his radio show on KMFB, which angered Murray, Atkinson, and VandenBosch, who singled him out among the union’s leadership as “pathetic” and not doing “jack shit”.²⁶

The issue might have remained unknown if it weren’t due to a bit of good fortune. A local Fort Bragg resident, Anna Marie Stenberg, who ran a day-care center out of her residence in sight of the mill, and happened to care for Ron Atkinson’s then three-year-old son, Jason, noticed that Ron was visibly upset one day when he came to retrieve the boy. Stenberg knew Atkinson and his wife to be people of solid integrity. When questioned, Atkinson explained to Stenberg the gravity of the situation, including his failed attempts to contact the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, the area’s most major daily periodical, to cover the issue in depth. When told about the burning of the cleanup materials in the hog furnace, Stenberg informed Atkinson that the issue was even larger than anyone had realized, because PCBs have to be taken to a special incinerator in order to be properly discarded. The hog wasn’t hot enough to do that, and under insufficient heat, burning PCBs turn into Dioxin. *In their effort to hide or even destroy the evidence, G-P had risked the health and safety of the entire city of Fort Bragg.*²⁷

Atkinson was now livid, and was determined to see justice done. Stenberg agreed to help, suggesting that Ron talk to her then husband, Mike Koepf, who was a freelance writer and submitted articles periodically to the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, which had a small circulation, but one large enough to at least get some notice. Atkinson, who was part Pomo Indian,

²³ “Fort Bragg Mill Closed by PCB Spill”, by Mike Geniella, February 16, 1988.

²⁴ “Hot Tubbin at Harry’s: Anna Marie Stenberg”, interview by Lynne Dahl, *New Settler Interview*, issue #54, December 1990.

²⁵ Geniella, February 16, 1988, op. cit.

²⁶ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

²⁷ Dahl, December 1990, op. cit.

²⁰ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

²¹ Anderson, July 26, 1989, op. cit.

²² Anderson, July 26, 1989, op. cit.

was used to fighting the powers that be, and this time was no exception.²⁸ Koepf interviewed Atkinson (who initially requested anonymity out of fear of reprisal), Murray, and VandenBosch, whose stories all corroborated one another's, and his article was published in the *Anderson Valley Advertiser* just over one month after the PCB spill.²⁹ He also interviewed Don Nelson, but chose not to include any of the quotes from the maligned union official, which irked the latter, who in turn wrote an angry letter to the editor (where he again underplayed the seriousness of the accident).³⁰ Both Bruce Anderson and Mike Koepf responded, equally angrily, pointing out that the reason why none of Nelson's statements had been printed was because they matched those of Georgia-Pacific word-for-word, and had dismissed the workers' concerns as trivial.³¹ PCBs and dioxin were no trivial matter, however. Mike Koepf had also reported:

“The Environmental Protection Agency banned the disposal of PCBs in 1975 after tumors and reproductive disorders showed up in laboratory animals. Trout have been killed by exposure of 8 parts per billion, shrimp by 1 part per billion. PCB is a suspected carcinogen. Early studies of PCB contamination concentrated on respiratory exposure, but recent studies are looking at other areas of the body. A long-term study of workers exposed to PCB printed in the Archives of Environmental Health in December, 1987, is focusing on the rectum, liver, gall bladder, and the biliary tract. The *American Industrial Hygiene Association Journal* in March, 1987, cites “evidence for dermal (skin) absorption as the major route of body entry.” Yet the EPA still officially measures exposure strictly by respiratory standards.

“Increasing public awareness, however, is forcing state governments to look to more current methods of approaching PCB exposure. Last year (1988) California voters passed Proposition 65, and to contaminate water with more than .045 parts per billion PCBs is now a reportable offense in this state. *The lab samples tak-*

en from the site of this spill were over 1,000 times more potent than this standard.”³²

Stenberg, meanwhile, volunteered perhaps as many as 40-hours per week, phoning the EPA, OSHA, and the Attorney General's Office; she then retained a lawyer, Karl Sigurd Leipnik of Healdsburg, for the injured workers.³³ Since few of the millworkers read Anderson's muckraking Boonville based periodical, Stenberg made copies of the article and had the families who used her daycare services recopy and distribute the bulletin throughout Fort Bragg. She also contacted Mendocino County District 5 Supervisor, Norm DeVall—not even fully aware of who he was—and described the incident in graphic detail on the air on the latter's community access radio show on KMFB. DeVall suggested that Stenberg contact Fort Bragg City Council member Andre Schade who was one official not completely in GP's pocket (or somebody who had once held a position in G-P management).³⁴ Schade agreed to place the issue on the agenda of the April 10, 1989 meeting.³⁵

Meanwhile, after hearing of the incident, at the March 28, 1989 Board of Supervisor's meeting, Dr. Craig McMillan, head of the Mendocino County's public health program was grilled in front of the Mendocino County supervisors by angry residents. Two issues angered them in particular. The first was a less than stellar report by the California Air Quality Control Board concerning Mendocino County's Air Pollution Control District, judging McMillan's Pollution Control District to be a failure.³⁶ The report declared that local violators were routinely excused by telephone calls, fines were left uncollected, and enforcement positions were routinely unfilled. The report also judged the standards by which tests were conducted as woefully inadequate, citing for example, an instance where the air quality test done at the G-P mill had been conducted “visually”. David Drell (who had participated in the coalition that had opposed L-P's aerial deployment of Garlon four years previously) accused McMillan of adopting policies that accepted the reports of local corporate polluters at face value.³⁷

³² Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit. Emphasis added.

³³ Dahl, December 1990, op. cit.

³⁴ Interview with Anna Marie Stenberg, October 18, 2009.

³⁵ Dahl, December 1990, op. cit.

³⁶ “Supervisors Review County Air Quality Audit”, by Keith Michaud, *Ukiah Daily Journal*, March 29, 1989 and “Look them in the Eyes: Health Department Cover-up”, by Mike Koepf, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, April 4, 1989.

³⁷ Koepf, April 4, 1989, op. cit.

²⁸ Dahl, December 1990, op. cit.

²⁹ Koepf, March 15, 1989, op. cit.

³⁰ “Don Nelson Replies”, letter to the editor, by Don Nelson, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, March 29, 1989.

³¹ “Bruce Anderson's Reply” and “Post Script from Mike Koepf”, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, March 29, 1989.

McMillan denied the allegations, making some rather incredulous rationalizations essentially comparing apples (rural pollution control standards) to oranges (urban pollution control standards). These excuses were endorsed in a rather comical utterance by Marilyn Butcher, who complained about regulations prohibiting her from lighting two smudge pots in her fruit orchard during cold weather.³⁸

Mike Koepf questioned McMillan on the PCB spill, reporting that when he had contacted his office for a report on the incident, they had simply forwarded Georgia-Pacific's official account on the spill (which was known to be full of omissions and falsehoods) as if that statement were the Health Department's official report. Koepf stated that the account included none of the statements made by Murray, Atkinson, or Vandenbosch, and that in fact, none of the workers had even been contacted. Koepf reported that he had confirmed this by interviewing individuals from the County Health Department by telephone. McMillan then lost his composure, accusing the assembled critics of badmouthing his underlings, stating that this "really ticked (him) off". He then presented a Health Department "Fact Sheet", dated March 27, unsigned and typed entirely in capital letters, not on official department stationary (which went against standard practice). The fact sheet, however, was so badly garbled, and included statements that suggested the Health Department declared the scene safe "AT G-P's REQUEST". While the statement may have been hastily assembled by McMillan and his staff in order to deflect attention away from their almost certain collaboration with G-P, they had actually painted themselves into a corner, because G-P used this very same "fact sheet" to convince OSHA that the area was indeed safe.³⁹

Now the truth was out completely. Angry residents who had read Koepf's first two articles showed up to confront the management of the de facto company town at the April 10, 1989 Fort Bragg city council meeting, and the powers that be were equally evasive and dismissive.⁴⁰ During the first twenty minutes of the Monday night meeting, various representatives of county and city public safety committees denied that their jurisdiction covered Georgia-Pacific's private property, which made an already upset audience—which included many G-P workers, some of

them on their lunch breaks—even angrier. During the public comment period that followed, speaker after speaker excoriated the public officials and G-P for their irresponsible behavior.⁴¹

Mayor Alden Thurman, sensing that the peasants were about to get out of hand, tried to adjourn the meeting, exclaiming, "We've heard enough." The audience ignored the mayor and began speaking from the floor. Anna Marie Stenberg again pointed out, this time to the assembled audience and public officials, that the PCBs burned in the hog could have potentially transformed into dioxin and rained down upon the residents of Fort Bragg. Ron Atkinson, who was one of the workers appearing in the council chambers during his lunch break on the swing shift, declared, "If it turns out that my son or my wife has any kind of problem from this, I'll kill the people responsible!" Vandenbosch reiterated her concerns as well to which the mayor responded, "It might not be as bad as you think. Don't we all have little accidents around the house and think they are bigger than they are?"⁴²

The workers and residents weren't buying it. At least one resident vowed to run against the mayor in the next election, saying, "We're here to talk about a large catastrophe with unknown effects and here's the Mayor chuckling about stubbed toes."⁴³ Lotte Moise, a Fort Bragg resident and environmental activist presented evidence that G-P had knowingly lied about the presence of PCBs and their foreknowledge of their danger, citing EPA studies taken two years previously. She asked why if G-P had known about this, they hadn't already removed the capacitors already.⁴⁴ Don Perry reassured the crowd that the company was taking the matter very seriously, including studying ways to safely remove the four other capacitors in the mill that used PCBs, but revealed that the company's bottom line came first, because so far each of the viable methods they had explored required shutting down the mill until the job was done.⁴⁵

Mendocino County air quality monitor Philip Towle then revealed that G-P had, for years, used the hog as an all purpose incinerator, not just as a cogeneration facility using wood debris as fuel, and that this was a violation of existing laws, but he added that he

⁴¹ "No One Has Jurisdiction: Fort Bragg City Council Hears Angry Citizens Denounce Georgia-Pacific's PCB Spill and Cover-up", by Bruce Anderson, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, April 12, 1989.

⁴² Anderson, April 12, 1989, op. cit.

⁴³ Anderson, April 12, 1989, op. cit.

⁴⁴ "Lotte Moise's Reactions", letter to the editor by Lotte Moise, *Fort Bragg Advocate News*, April 20, 1989 and *North Coast News*, April 20, 1989.

⁴⁵ Anderson, April 12, 1989, op. cit.

³⁸ Michaud, March 30, 1989, op. cit., and Koepf, April 4, 1989, op. cit.

³⁹ Koepf, April 4, 1989, op. cit.

⁴⁰ "PCB Spill at Mill Topic in Fort Bragg", By Pat McKay, *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, April 10, 1989.

believed that the company had been unaware of their violations. Towle also stated, however, that he couldn't consistently enforce the policy, as he was one official (based in Ukiah, which is somewhat distant from the remote and rocky coast) with no staff and an entire, mostly rural county to police. Ultimately, the City Council agreed to convene a public safety meeting and announce the date in the local press. An ad hoc committee of concerned Fort Bragg residents promised to investigate the matter further and submit expert testimony regarding PCBs and dioxins.⁴⁶ While this action barely scratched the surface of the problem, their movement all spoke to the seriousness of the situation in the virtual company town of Fort Bragg.

After having been exposed as having lied to the public, Georgia-Pacific publically (though half-heartedly) admitted, the following day, that they had indeed covered up the affair. Don Perry declared, "Admittedly mistakes were made," though when asked to explain why, he offered "faulty record keeping from past efforts to rid the mill of hazardous material." This explanation did not sit well with Treva Vandebosch, who angrily retorted, "I'm so furious. This whole thing was botched from day one. We were lied to. If the workers hadn't made such a fit, nothing would ever have been done. Production came before the workers; it's as simple as that." Newly elected Mendocino County supervisor Liz Henry agreed, declaring, "The people directly involved in this believed they had been affected, but they could not get anyone to listen."⁴⁷

The people of Fort Bragg and affected workers refused to remain silent, however. On May 10, 1989, attorney Karl Sigurd Leipnik served notice on behalf of the affected workers and residents of Fort Bragg with California State Attorney General, John Van De Kamp; Mendocino County District Attorney, Susan Massini; and Fort Bragg City Attorney Tom Lonergan of GP's violations of numerous sections of the California Health and Safety Code. The violations included Section 25249.6 (knowing and intentional exposure of workers and residents to toxic substances), Section 25180.7 (the illegal improper disposal of toxic waste and the failure to obtain permits for toxic waste disposal), and others.⁴⁸

Five days later, the EPA made a surprise visit to G-P headquarters in Fort Bragg, apparently because the agency was less than satisfied with the company's documentation of events. *Mendocino Commentary* coeditor Harold Blythe waited a week and then contacted Don Perry who initially denied the visit, but quickly and defensively admitted that this did indeed take place, but that there would be no press release discussing the matter. Blythe sensed that Perry was under strict orders to keep the matter quiet.⁴⁹ The matter was finally referred to California OSHA who fined G-P \$14,000 for "willfully exposing" workers to PCBs during and after the incident on February 11, 1989.⁵⁰ The community's assumptions had been anything but "unfounded" as suggested by IWA representative Don Nelson.⁵¹

Meanwhile, the *Ukiah Daily Journal*, (and other publications) who had been quick to condemn Earth First! for the tree spiking (which they didn't commit) that nearly killed George Alexander had nothing whatsoever to say about the incident. In a virtual company town, held hostage by the threat of "job blackmail" by Corporate Timber, the people evidently had to face the possibility of death in order for their lives to matter. To the Corporate Media, however, the issue was evidently only newsworthy if it could be blamed on "unwashed-out-of-town-jobless-hippies-on-drugs."

⁴⁹ "Publisher's Corner", by Harold Blythe, *Mendocino Commentary*, May 25, 1989.

⁵⁰ "G-P Mill Fined for Spilling Chemicals", by Mike Geniella, *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, August 17, 1989 (in some editions this story was more prominent and also had the subheading "Company Violated Health, Safety Rules").

⁵¹ "Here and There in Mendocino County", by Bruce Anderson, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, August 16, 1989.

⁴⁶ Anderson, April 12, 1989, op. cit.

⁴⁷ "G-P Admits Workers Not Told of Toxic Spill", by Mike Geniella, *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, April 12, 1989.

⁴⁸ "Notice is Served on GP's PCB Spill", public announcement, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, May 10, 1989.