

Lawsuit filed to get NDK Crystal information, solutions

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BELVIDERE — Boone County State's Attorney Michelle Courier and Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed a joint lawsuit against NDK Crystal to compel the company to detail what harmful chemicals were present during a Dec. 7 explosion and to map out solutions to prevent similar incidents from happening at the Crystal Parkway plant.

"(This) is seeing if we can reach a cooperative order with NDK and bring this to a resolution in a quick, efficient manner," Courier said.

Danger 'continues unabated'

The two-count complaint filed Dec. 31 alleges the company posed environmental and health hazards when the explosion sent a cloud of quartz particles over the area. When inhaled, "fine quartz particles can trigger serious respiratory ailments, including silicosis," according to the complaint.

These circumstances create "substantial danger to the environment and to public health and welfare, which continues unabated," the complaint reads.

Madigan spokesman Scott Mulford said the lawsuit is in part a result of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's Dec. 22 referral of the case to Madigan's office. The IEPA sought to force NDK Crystal to disclose what chemicals from its Belvidere plant may have polluted the soil, air and water after the explosion.

"There is one count of endangerment to the environment because of the releases that occurred," Mulford said. "The other one is the resulting count of air pollution from the blast itself and the disbursement of crystals and chemicals into the environment."

Company 'cooperating'

NDK Crystal attorney Gary Vist said the company is "fully cooperating" with both offices under a common goal and expects they will be able to come to an agreed solution soon.

NDK's \$12.5 million, 55,000-square-foot building, visible from Interstate 90, opened in 2003. Inside are several 50-foot-tall, 75-ton vessels in which synthetic quartz crystal is grown. Debris from the Dec. 7 explosion killed a truck driver about 400 feet away at the Belvidere Oasis.

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