

The Bhopal Plant

Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) owned, operated and managed on a daily basis the Bhopal plant. UCIL was an Indian company in which Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) held just over half the stock. The other stockholders included Indian financial institutions and thousands of private investors in India.

UCIL was a diversified manufacturing company established in 1934, when UCC became one of the first U.S. companies to invest in India. Employing approximately 9,000 people, UCIL operated 14 plants in five divisions. Annual sales were nearly \$200 million, and UCIL shares were publicly traded on the Calcutta Stock Exchange.

UCIL designed and constructed the Bhopal plant in the late 1970's using Indian consultants and workers. The plant -- operated by an Indian plant management team -- was constructed on land leased to UCIL by the Indian state government of Madhya Pradesh. The plant produced pesticides for use in India to help the country's agricultural sector increase its productivity and contribute more significantly to meeting the food needs of one of the world's most heavily populated regions.

In 1994, UCC sold its entire stake in UCIL to MacLeod Russell (India) Limited, which renamed the company, Eveready Industries India, Limited (Eveready Industries). In 1998, the state government of Madhya Pradesh took over the Bhopal site from Eveready Industries.

Site Clean Up

After the incident, UCIL began clean-up work at the site under the direction of Indian central and state government authorities. Following the sale of UCIL stock in 1994, Eveready Industries continued clean-up work at the site until 1998. The Madhya Pradesh State Government, which owns and had been leasing the property to UCIL, took over the facility in 1998 and assumed all accountability for the site. In 2004, a Public Interest Litigation was filed and is currently before the State of Madhya Pradesh High Court in Jabalpur. One of the claims made in the litigation -- against the Union of India, the State of Madhya Pradesh and private companies allegedly responsible -- seeks remediation of the plant site.

However, according to media reports, court-ordered remediation efforts directed at the government entities have proceeded slowly. For example, the media reported in 2007 that the Supreme Court of India had directed the central and state governments to pay for collection of waste on the site and to have it landfilled or incinerated, as appropriate. While some of the waste has been landfilled, incineration has been challenged by public interest groups and the State of Gujarat, where the waste incineration facility is located.

Proposals made by private companies have similarly been questioned or rejected. For example, activist groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have protested against and repeatedly blocked remediation attempts by those who offered to help raise funds for clean up or to conduct pro-bono remediation. It's surprising that the very people who claim to have dedicated their lives to helping the people of Bhopal continue to block efforts to clean up the site.