

McHenry County Gravel Advisory Council



Frequently Asked Questions About The McHenry County Aggregate Industry

The McHenry County Gravel Advisory Council (Council) is comprised of the chief elected official of each of the local units of government within McHenry County, Illinois and the chief corporate official of each company producing aggregates within McHenry County. The Council was established to provide a forum for the county, townships and municipalities to discuss mine-related issues impacting their communities. This forum also provides a platform for aggregate producers to communicate the positive contributions being made as well as foster continued participation and growth as corporate neighbors. To further these goals, the Council developed the following informational brochure in answer to frequently asked questions about the McHenry County aggregate industry.

Question #1: Does Mining Pollute the Air?

Answer: Due to its close proximity to the earth's surface, sand and gravel (aggregates) extracted in McHenry County normally have a natural moisture content between 2% and 4% which, according to United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) research data, provides adequate pollution control to convey raw materials on site. Emissions from gravel processing operations are easily controlled and the emissions typically do not travel beyond the plant area.

In addition, most of the aggregates mined in McHenry County are washed at the plant and therefore, produce minimal emissions at the plant because the products become saturated during processing.

Fugitive emissions may be generated by vehicles entering and exiting the plant site and are visible to passing motorists. Mine operators use "best management practices" to reduce the level of fugitive emissions that leave the site. Paved entrances, on-site water trucks, street sweepers, wheel wash systems, vegetation, etc. are employed to reduce or eliminate fugitive emissions that can be tracked off site.

Sand and gravel mining in McHenry County is regulated by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA). The IEPA, Bureau of Air is in charge of enforcing Federal and State air pollution regulations. Mine operators are required to obtain an Operating Permit from the Bureau of Air for the regulation of Particulate Matter (PM) emissions in order to convey and process aggregates.

Mine operators are also required to complete an Annual Emission Report to disclose PM emissions for each calendar year, based on recorded production levels and emission rate factors generated by USEPA research data. In addition, when new equipment is introduced into the production process, operators are required to notify the IEPA, test the equipment and submit the test results within a specified period of time.

Question #2: Does Mining Pollute the Water?

Answer: In McHenry County, most aggregate mines do not discharge water because they recycle water during mining and processing operations. Typically, water from on-site surface water sources (including the capture of storm runoff) is used to wash the silts and clays out of the sand and gravel, so the finished products are clean for market applications. The wash waters containing silts and clays are pumped into a sedimentation pond, allowing the fines particles to settle out on-site. “Clean” wash water is then recycled back to the processing plant for continued use in the washing process. In addition, some of the water retained by on-site surface water sources is lost to evaporation or infiltrates into subsurface flows.

The IEPA, Bureau of Water is in charge of enforcing Federal and State water pollution regulations. Mine operators are required to obtain an Operating Permit from the Bureau of Water for the regulation of storm and process waters within a mining site. Depending on the type of the mine configuration, the State will require a permit to retain or a permit to discharge all waters associated with the mining activities.

If a discharge permit is required, the mine operator must submit monthly monitoring reports to the IEPA, with calculations indicating the quantity and quality of water being discharged. The water that is discharged from a site is usually a mixture of stormwater, groundwater seepage, and surplus wash water, and must meet the effluent limitations of the Permit. Along with this important permitting function, the Bureau of Water is empowered to perform unannounced, random inspections. Operators who violate Federal and State water quality laws are subject to fines and criminal prosecution.

Since 1991, the McHenry County Planning and Development Department has compiled a large database of information generated by a mandatory groundwater monitoring program at all aggregate mines regulated by the County. This data, public information available from the Department, clearly establishes the following: **aggregate mining does not have an adverse impact on McHenry County groundwater resources.**

Question #3: Does Mining Generate an Excessive Amount of Noise?

Answer: Noise pollution is regulated by the IEPA and noise levels are required to be in compliance with State law. In addition, mining operations are typically screened from the public view by earth berms, trees, etc. that provide more than adequate noise attenuation at the property boundaries.



Question #4: Are Mining Companies Good Stewards of the Land?

Answer: The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) requires a Surface Mining Permit for all operations that affect over 10 acres per year by mining or remove more than 10 feet of overburden. A Surface Mining Permit application requires the operator to submit an operating plan that illustrates how the land will be affected by mining operations as well as a reclamation plan that describes how the mined land will be restored for future use.

In order to receive a Surface Mining Permit, the operator must post a bond with the State of Illinois that obligates the company to perform the activities specified in the reclamation plan. Mine inspections are performed annually by IDNR representatives; progress is mapped via aerial photography.



Reclamation bonds can only be released if the IDNR inspector finds that enough work has been completed to allow the property to be returned to a productive use, as set forth in the operator's reclamation plan. If the operator fails to comply with the approved reclamation plan, the State may file a claim against the amount of the bond. The State then uses the bond proceeds to complete the reclamation of the mined land.

The State's aggregate mine regulatory program was enacted more than 30 years ago. To date, only one aggregate mine in Illinois (and none in McHenry County) has failed to comply with its reclamation plan, thereby triggering bond forfeiture. The reason for this excellent industry track record is apparent – **the residual value of reclaimed land is simply too valuable for a mine operator to walk away from.**

Question #5: Does Mining Erode the Value of Surrounding Properties?

Answer: As noted in Question #4, mining companies in McHenry County understand the value of land in this County. Reclaiming land after 20 years of mining can produce substantial benefits beyond the mining activity itself. Some of the most unique developments across the U.S. can be attributed to creative, long-term mine planning for secondary uses.

Independent evaluations have been performed in McHenry County to show that lands adjacent to or near an aggregate mining site are not affected by mining activities. Mining is an interim use of the land – with proper execution, there is a future land development that will follow that interim use.

While there is some sensitivity involved in buying and selling real estate property adjacent to a mining operation, it is apparent that real estate values are generally not impacted by aggregate mining.

Question #6: Are Mining Companies Good Neighbors?

Answer: Commercial aggregate mining has taken place in McHenry County for many decades. In the past 20 years, the rural nature of McHenry County has changed significantly due to economic growth. Most mining companies in the County are now surrounded by this growth, and are changing with the urban landscape.



McHenry County aggregate producers are heavily involved in the day-to-day lives of their neighbors and work hard to be good corporate citizens. For example:

- They participate in a variety of educational activities including: the McHenry County Gravel Advisory Council, fieldtrips, tours and open house events
- They support local commerce initiatives and generate tax revenues
- They provide materials for special projects (schools, park districts, etc.)
- They participate in neighborhood committees adjacent to their operations
- They support many jobs at the local level, including the trucking industry
- They supply the region with high quality materials at competitive prices

For More Information Contact: