Minnesota Industrial Sand Council

MPCA – Winona Air Monitoring Results

Contact: Dennis Egan
612 325-1330
Eganpublicaffairs@gmail.com

For more than a century, Minnesota companies have been involved in safe and environmentally responsible sand mining. Minnesota silica sand is used for a number of purposes, including sandpaper, glass making, sand casting, chemical production, construction and well fracking.

The Minnesota Industrial Sand Council commends the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the City of Winona for bringing more facts and data to the public discussion of silica sand mining and transportation in Minnesota. The MPCA study shows that silica particles are very rarely detectable in the air in Winona, and when they are detectable it's at a small fraction of the level of concern established by the Minnesota Department of Health and the federal government. Most telling, the MPCA study showed that silica levels are detected more often and at higher levels in a Southeast Minnesota area far from any sand mining or sand transportation activity.

The MPCA study confirms the results of data that has already been collected near existing silica sand facilities operating under existing MPCA air quality permits. That MPCA required monitoring at those facilities shows that silica particles are rarely even detectable and when they are detectable it's at a small fraction of the level of concern. Those results are not surprising given the rigor of the Minnesota environmental review and permitting processes that Minnesota mining companies are subject to, and the processes put in place by silica sand facilities to utilize best practices for mining and processing.

Given the strong statements made by some groups about our industry and the hyperbole that some use to attempt to influence local and state policy makers, the Winona data is even more important. The 2013 Legislature directed the MPCA to review the air quality rules applicable to silica sand facilities. Legislators, MPCA leaders and local government elected officials all now have very solid data on silica sand particulate matter from silica sand mining, processing and transportation. All of that data shows one thing—that Minnesota's current regulatory requirements are protecting human health and the environment. Any claims to the contrary are simply not supportable.

Our industry supports strong state standards, stringent environmental review and responsible, fact-based state and local permitting. We believe local government officials, with assistance from state agencies as needed, know the most about the communities where we work and live and are best positioned to oversee these issues.

Dennis Egan is executive director of the Minnesota Industrial Sand Council.