

Firestone Liberia and Bridgestone Corporation Must Investigate Pollution Claims

Bridgestone Corporation, one of the world's largest tyre companies, and its indirect subsidiary Firestone Liberia Inc. must take urgent action to investigate serious environmental pollution in the vicinity of its rubber processing plant in Liberia, argues a new Swedwatch report published today.

Natural rubber is used in a wide range of products, from car tyres to medical devices and clothes, and provides a livelihood for millions of workers. But its production process has long been associated with human rights impacts and is one of the worst water polluting industries.

Firestone Liberia operates the world's largest rubber plantation in Owensgrove, 50 km west of the capital Monrovia, and is the country's largest private employer with a land concession occupying nearly ten percent of its arable land.

During a Swedwatch investigation, air and water samples from around the processing site were analysed by Swedwatch's project partner NGO Source International. The water analysis found levels of heavy metals such as manganese and aluminium that clearly exceeded limits for drinking water. According to Source International, these pollutants constitute a severe health risk for humans as they bio-accumulate throughout the food chain and can cause serious illness. There were also high phosphate and nitrogen levels and evidence of eutrophication, known to deplete fish stocks.

"These results suggested that the company's wastewater treatment system had not been working adequately and confirmed much of what local community members told us", said Swedwatch researcher and report author Hannah Peters.

In meetings with more than 100 local residents in February 2020, Swedwatch collected reports of people falling ill after consuming local water supplies and suffering from a variety of health problems including infections, nausea, and from food shortages due to fish die-offs. Just ahead of the report's publication, community representatives described the situation as unchanged.

"This situation has been ongoing for years and the company still claims that they are treating wastewater and filtering the air. But still, the local communities don't have enough fish to eat because of water pollution and they have a lot of pollution-related health problems," said Francis Colee, director of Green Advocates International, Swedwatch's project partner in Liberia.

In response to these findings Firestone Liberia stated that "it is fully acknowledged with all stakeholders that certain nutrient constituents in the wastewater have, on multiple occasions, exceeded permitted standards." However, the company claimed to be unaware of "any harm or damage resulting from these exceedances." Further, the company claims to operate within all required air-permits.



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Swedwatch and its project partners call on Firestone Liberia and Bridgestone Corporation to urgently conduct human rights due diligence and a human rights and environmental impact assessment in relation to its rubber processing plant in Liberia. These results must be shared with communities and action taken to rectify any shortcomings.

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