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For Immediate Release

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Virginia DEQ Takes a First Step Toward Protecting Citizens and Water

Today's announcements by MVP, LLC and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), that work will stop on the Mountain Valley Pipeline so MVP can "redirect its work efforts to focus exclusively on erosion controls," is a necessary and proper first step by the company and DEQ.

However, much more must be done. MVP must not be allowed to proceed with its destruction unless and until citizens are ensured that our waters and our communities will be fully protected, as we were promised when state officials granted previous approvals. This bandaid cannot heal the wounds already inflicted or prevent those that will occur if DEQ allows business-as-usual to continue.

First, the problems that have already arisen were certain to occur and the pollution control measures DEQ has accepted will not work, either on the upland areas or in crossings of waterbodies. Citizens told the Governor, DEQ, and the State Water Control Board exactly that and backed up our contentions with science. Now the truth of our warnings is being proven.

State officials must now act to correct the deficiencies in the processes previously used to allow this project to go forward. The Board must act quickly to require individual waterbody crossing analyses and DEQ must re-assess its approvals of the erosion and sediment control and stormwater management plans.

DEQ's weak and apathetic response to serious problems, since the day construction began, cannot be excused by today's voluntary pause by MVP. Without question, DEQ would not have known about many of MVP's violations, water quality damages they've caused, and encroachments on landowner's rights without the vigilance of groups like Mountain Valley Watch, citizen volunteers, and residents.

And DEQ's inexcusable delay, while MVP continued to discharge mud off its construction sites has certainly caused damages that can't be easily fixed. How many people have already been harmed by the company's actions? How many waterbodies have been damaged?

Even in today's announcement, DEQ appears to be playing the role of timid junior partner to MVP, rather than that of the people's watchdog. DEQ is supposed to be acting to protect Virginians and our waters by using the legal authorities it has been given, including the new "stop work" powers the General Assembly granted in January of this year. The Department should not be asking the company to do what it was obligated to do from the start but ordering compliance every step of the way.

We've already seen how effective DEQ's agreements with MVP are. According to announcements in May, when MVP covered Cahas Mountain Road in Franklin County with mud and allowed pollution to flow over farmer's lands and into streams, DEQ and MVP agreed that MVP would voluntarily stop work until the problems were corrected. And yet, several days later the company was allowed to resume work despite the obvious remaining problems at its sites. In the following weeks MVP caused numerous other pollution incidents, demonstrating that DEQ's weak approach had made little if any impression on the company. Can we trust that the problems will be solved this time or will this agreement be mere show? Will work resume again, even though the threats are still just as great?

It is time for DEQ to issue citations and assess penalties against MVP wherever it has violated the law by releasing its pollution off its sites. It is time for DEQ to stand up to this corporation; to stop asking for compliance and begin demanding it.

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