

Adding Green to the Mittal Steel Landscape

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In three years time, a drive down the highway near the Mittal Steel Industrial complex might not be a gray as it looks today. The company is taking steps to add some green to the landscape. ideastream's Lisa Ann Pinkerton has more.

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Over a hundred years ago, a prairie covered the valley floor where the Mittal Steel Mill sits. But today vegetation is sparse among the slag piles and truck traffic. Mittal Steel wants to change that, by reintroducing native plants to its 950-acre property (see illustrations below). The company turned to Jim Bissell at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to oversee the project. Under his direction, green buffer zones are being planted along the banks of the Cuyahoga River to soak up water running off the mill's property. Also, the large piles of fine black ash, a by-product of the steel making process, will soon grow eight-foot tall switch grass which Bissell says will do more than beautify the industrial landscape.

Jim Bissell: When the wind blows through it, particulates, sand, silt, dust will actually settle right out into the base of the plant. And the plant can actually grow through what ever settles out.

Mittal Steel spokesman Chuck Glazer says this reclamation effort proves the company's desire to to be a good neighbor.

Chuck Glazer: We do what's right, not just what is required.

However, Sandy Buchanan of Ohio Citizen Action thinks the reclamation project will do little to improve the air quality surrounding the mill.

Sandy Buchanan: We certainly don't object to them beautifying their property. But that is not going to solve the problem.

The problem, she says, are the emissions of sulfur dioxide and soot coming from the mill's smoke stacks. She says prairie grass will do little to stop those pollutants from blowing through the neighborhoods of 360,000 residents living within three miles of Mittal Steel.

Even though Mittal Steel is in compliance with pollution standards, Buchanan says its still the largest polluter in Cuyahoga County. She thinks the mill could do more to cut its emissions. But Chuck Glazer argues nothing more can be done.

Chuck Glazer: We already meet all maximum available control technology standards. We have for several years. There is no technology available that would do anything more than is already being done.

On this claim, Sandy Buchanan is skeptical. But she concedes, at the very least, the large green dust filter of native prairie grass will be better than what's there now. Lisa Ann Pinkerton, 90.3.

Photographs and descriptions courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Natural History and Dr. James Bissell, Curator of Botany





wafer ash (*Ptelea trifoliata*)

Wafer ash is a deciduous, woody shrub and is one of two native members of the citrus family in Ohio. Each leaf is composed of a three-parted compound leaflets; the central leaflet averages five inches long and the two side leaflets are slightly smaller, generally running three inches long; the leaflets are borne on stalks (petioles) averaging three inches long; each shrub is either male or female, an attribute called dioecious (meaning two houses); the fruits on the female shrubs resemble round wafers and the wafers are borne in large round masses.



prairie dock (*Silphium terrebinthenaceum*)

Prairie dock, a herbaceous member of the sunflower family has several large, yellow flowers borne eight to ten feet above the ground; prairie dock is a member of the Tall Grass Prairie Community; the stout stems bearing the flowers extend several feet above the shield-shaped leaves. The leaves are generally one foot across and two feet long; the leaves are borne on stems (petioles) extending one to two feet above the ground surface.



staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*)

Staghorn sumacs are colonial, deciduous woody shrubs with long compound leaves often with 20 leaflets born in pairs along the axis with one at the tip of a 21-inch-long stalk; each leaflet is five to six inches long and one to two inches wide; each shrub is either male or female; the female clones bear cone-shaped purple red fruit late in the summer; the dense clusters of fruit are widest at the bottom and taper to a pointed tip; the fruits usually run five inches long and two to three inches wide at the base; the fruits persist on the shrubs until January or February when they are eaten by several species of birds.



switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)

Switchgrass, a grass in a group called warm season grasses, has long one-half-inch-wide leaves in a dense mass often three feet across and four to five feet high; the plume-like spray of small flowers rises two feet or more above the tops of the leaves; small, narrow flowers about one-quarter-inch long are borne along the ends of two to twelve-inch-long spreading branches; the flowers are purplish green in color.