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Glyptis: Hope for Weirton's Hot Mill

By JUSTIN CHESNIC And ADAM TOWNSEND

Mittal Weirton's hot mill could remain operating into the future, Independent Steelworkers Union President Mark Glyptis said Thursday, saving as many as 200 jobs that were marked for elimination.

This news came hours after 40 other jobs cuts were announced at Mittal Weirton, as plant general manager Brian James said Weirton's sheet mill will be idled in the near future.

"We are done accepting orders for galvanized product here in Weirton," James said of the sheet mill. "It is being idled."

Neither James nor other officials with Mittal Steel USA could be reached for comment on the hot mill situation. ISU spokesman David Gossett said the hot mill is the portion of the facility that rolls steel into finished coils.

"Our union leadership was at the corporate headquarters of Mittal Steel USA in Chicago twice during the past two weeks. During our lengthy discussions we made very strong arguments to maintain our hot mill facilities and the corporate officials listened and have agreed with us," Glyptis said.

Glyptis said production lost with the idling of the sheet mill will be replaced with increased production in other product lines.

The main purpose of the sheet mill, which is also known as the galvanized mill, is to add a layer of protective zinc over the steel.

James said the sheet mill will be idled sometime in the next two to three months, and not as many jobs will be lost as when the hot end was idled back in November.

"It is well under 100 — that number is probably around 40," James said of the job losses.

James said the main reason for the idling of the sheet mill is because its gauge, or thickness, is so light it causes the galvanized line to run slowly.

"We have to run it at incredibly slow speeds," James said. "As an end result, it produces less tons, which makes it difficult to make money."

James said despite the announcement, the people who work in the sheet mill have done a tremendous job.

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“They do things that are efficient; everything you want to see done in a steel mill,” James said.

Independent Steelworkers Union President Mark Glyptis added that there are still ongoing actions to try and keep the sheet mill in operation.

Glyptis said that he, James and other officials at the Weirton plant were to meet with officials at West Virginia University on Thursday to try and bring in new equipment that could save fuel consumption in the sheet mill by 30 to 40 percent.

“If we can make a minimal investment, it could make the numbers look better,” Glyptis said.

He could not be reached for further comment late Thursday.

Glyptis also said it was discussed during a recent meeting with senior management at Mittal Steel USA, including Chief Executive Officer Louis Schorsch and board members from London and Canada, that the hot mill could remain open.

“We were able to receive a favorable result on the hot mill,” Glyptis said. “The sheet mill was not as favorable.”

In late November, Mittal Weirton announced the blast furnaces — also known as the hot end — of the mill would be idled and about 950 workers would be laid off. If the sheet mill is idled, the total number of job losses at the plant could climb to about 1,000.

In other news, Glyptis said the mill is still waiting to hear from the U.S. Department of Labor to see if it will receive Trade Adjustment Assistance. The TAA program is used to help recently displaced workers at the mill receive training in different fields such as electrical, welding, nursing, and others. Glyptis said in order for the program to be approved, there has to be evidence that the layoffs occurred because of illegal dumping.

“The investigation has not been completed, but it is getting toward the end,” Glyptis said.

Glyptis also said a possible severance package for the laid-off workers is still in the works.

“We are still working on a couple things, we are trying to ease the pain,” Glyptis said.



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