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Mittal Will Continue to Operate Hot Mill

Posted 2/9/2006 06:00 AM

Move will save more than 200 jobs at weirton plant.

Story By Linda Harris

Mittal Weirton will lose another 35 jobs with the idling of its galvanizing line, but Independent Steelworkers Union President Mark Glyptis said more than 200 jobs in the hot mill have been saved.

Union leaders met several times at Mittal USA corporate headquarters in Chicago to discuss the Weirton plant's operation, Glyptis said. Several members of the board of directors were involved in the discussions.

"At the conclusion of those discussions, in which we were presenting financial arguments to maintain the hot mill, we were informed the company will continue to operate the hot mill," he said. "That saves north of 200 jobs. That's positive news."

Mittal USA announced early in December it would idle its so-called "hot end" - blast furnace and basic oxygen plant operations -- at the Weirton plant, a move that will idle as many as 850 workers.

However, in its Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act notice, otherwise known as a "WARN letter," Mittal cautioned as many as 950 jobs could be lost.

How many jobs ultimately will be impacted by cutbacks at the Weirton plant has not been decided, Glyptis said.

"What's happening here is happening at other facilities as well," Glyptis said. "(They) are also being examined for efficiencies and synergies."

Glyptis, however, said he concedes Weirton has taken "the lion's share" of the operations' reductions within Mittal USA.

"Obviously, we'd much rather run the hot end (along with the hot mill)," he added. "But they evaluate each and every unit within each facility and determine what's the best way to operate the facilities. It's really difficult, it's a tough competition -- we're competing against other mills, and it's a very complicated analysis they're doing. Having said that, I believe our hot end should be running. We've done things to make the hot end more efficient and we believe the hot end should be part of this organization, but the decision


February 17, 2006

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has been made -- at least at this point -- to indefinitely idle hot end operations."

He said union leaders have met with specialists from West Virginia University and Tennessee's Oak Ridge Foundation to identify ways Weirton can reduce gas consumption and utility use.

"We're hoping to get the galvanizing line back in the equation," he said. "It comes down to dollars and cents ... if we can run cheaper than somebody else, most likely we're going to get the work."

He said tonnages associated with the galvanizing line's operation would be shifted to other parts of Weirton's operation to allow the plant to maintain its product volume.

Glyptis, meanwhile, also said the union and Mittal are finishing work on a severance package for workers who lose their jobs.

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