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The massive BP oil refinery in Whiting, Ind., is planning to expand, creating jobs and refining more gasoline. Normally, this would be cause for celebration. But unfortunately, there's something else that almost certainly comes with this plan: More pollution dumped into Lake Michigan. To be specific, a new Indiana state water permit allows BP to discharge significantly more ammonia and fine-particle pollution that may be tainted with concentrated heavy metals.

Ammonia promotes algae blooms that can kill fish; heavy metals can be harmful to fish or humans depending on concentrations.

BP's plan has passed all sorts of state and federal hurdles. Company officials assert they've done everything they could to keep more pollution out of the lake. Indiana state and federal regulators have agreed that there isn't enough room at the 1,400-acre site to upgrade the refinery's water treatment plant. And it should be noted that even with the proposed increase, the company's plant will still fall within the maximums set by federal guidelines.

So everything's apparently legal. And that's the most troubling part of this story. Have we not spent millions of dollars and decades to clean up the lake and keep it that way? Haven't we heard from task force after task force about ways to scrub it further, to battle invasive species, scour the harbors, control runoff and protect this singular resource? Doesn't that -- shouldn't that -- include forbidding increased dumping from oil refineries or any other source?

Environmental rules and regs for water pollution, like those for the air, can get murky and exasperatingly arcane. You can drown in the details. No exception here. But the intent of the federal Clean Water Act is perfectly clear: It is supposed to clean the nation's lakes, rivers and streams and keep them that way. That's why there are so-called anti-backsliding rules for the Great Lakes, designed to strongly discourage companies from increasing pollution under most circumstances.

In this case, however, Indiana regulators relented, ruling that the project would not harm the environment. And the federal EPA agreed. So, for what may be the first time in years, a

company has been granted leave to dump more pollutants into Lake Michigan.

We like jobs. We like gasoline. But this page's policy on dumping any more pollution into Lake Michigan isn't tangled in skeins of regulation or submerged in legal jargon. It's this: No. No more polluting of the lake.

The reason is as obvious as the lake itself: As Lake Michigan goes, so goes Chicago -- and Milwaukee, and much of the upper Midwest.

Now U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and U.S. Reps. Rahm Emanuel and Mark Kirk are leaning on the U.S. EPA to put a hold on the permit until they get answers to a raft of questions. Chicago is also joining the fight.

BP and federal and state regulators look to have followed the letter of the law in this case, but the result is, as Kirk aptly put it, "stunningly boneheaded." We have no doubt that BP is trying hard to minimize pollution while maximizing things we all want -- jobs and more gasoline. But if BP wants to live up to its advertising as an environmentally sensitive company, it would be well-advised to find another way to expand its plant, one that doesn't threaten to further pollute Lake Michigan.