

# Mead board revokes AltEn's permit; cleanup efforts continue at ethanol plant

- [Chris Dunker](#) - Lincoln Journal Star
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- [https://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/mead-board-revokes-altens-permit-cleanup-efforts-continue-at-ethanol-plant/article\\_7670fb7d-bb96-51e7-ac1d-8165a159ddc8.html#tracking-source=home-top-story-1](https://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/mead-board-revokes-altens-permit-cleanup-efforts-continue-at-ethanol-plant/article_7670fb7d-bb96-51e7-ac1d-8165a159ddc8.html#tracking-source=home-top-story-1)

MEAD — The Mead Board of Trustees revoked AltEn's conditional use permit Tuesday, but will allow the ethanol plant to keep operating to remediate pesticide-contaminated soil and water sitting at its facility.

In a 5-0 vote, the board ratified the Mead Planning Commission's recommendation to strip AltEn of its permit to manufacture ethanol, while allowing the Kansas-based company to continue using equipment and machinery to cleanup and dispose of chemicals contaminating the site.

Those efforts, led by seed company giants such as Bayer, Corteva and Syngenta, appear to be underway at AltEn, which is located roughly a mile south of Mead, but was annexed into the village.

Heavy equipment has been seen preparing the site for the installation of six Poseidon storage tanks capable of holding a combined 18 million gallons of raw and filtered wastewater that will be pumped from a trio of lagoons.

Three tanks, which resemble above-ground swimming pools, have already been installed to control the levels of AltEn's lagoon system, which has been subject to emergency complaints, consent orders and a lawsuit filed by the Nebraska Attorney General.

According to the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy, the lagoons are badly damaged — as evidenced by rips in the liners, and "whales," or blisters, that can be seen above the surface of the water — and operating over capacity in violation of state regulations.

The department continues to document problems, including dikes overgrown with vegetation, leaks in a pumping system, and rips that allow water to leach into the ground underneath.

Mead residents and officials who spoke during a public hearing at Tuesday's meeting said they remained skeptical of AltEn — as well as the companies that sent discarded treated seed to the ethanol plant — were taking the right approach to cleanup.

Jody Weible, who filed numerous complaints about the company with the Department of Environment and Energy going back years, said the board needed more information about the tank farm now under construction.

"You've got to have some kind of contingency plan that's going to be safe for our community," Weible said, "and a giant swimming pool on top of the ground isn't good for our community."

John Schnell, pastor of Mead Covenant Church, urged the board to include a condition in the permit moving forward allowing village officials to have access to AltEn's property for oversight.

The village shouldn't be content for the Department of Environment and Energy to represent Mead keeping an eye on cleanup efforts, Schnell said. "You need someone who represents you and represents us.

"Whatever you do, do the best thing you can do, and we're going to do our best to support you," Schnell added.

The language approved by the Board of Trustees did not include a provision requiring AltEn allow a Mead official onto the property, however.

Trustee Jason Lee said Mead still has yet to see a remediation plan from AltEn, and wanted to avoid giving residents of the village the impression that the company would be allowed to restart after the pesticide contamination was dealt with.

Bill Thorson, the chair of the village board, said while state environmental regulators "dropped the ball" in addressing concerns about AltEn raised by Mead for years, said he believed "the right people are on the job."

"We do have to have a little trust," he said.

Stephen Mossman, an attorney representing AltEn, said after the meeting the board's decision to revoke the permit with exceptions rather than suspend the permit with conditions — what the company had pushed the planning commission to adopt — was "a distinction without a difference."

Mossman added that AltEn was pleased the board chose not to add any further conditions to the permit, and indicated the company may soon announce further plans for cleanup.

At the same time, AltEn has started sending signals that it no longer plans to operate an ethanol plant in Saunders County.

The owners of the plant are selling the neighboring cattle yard that provided manure to be processed into methane gas to run the facility — part of the "closed-loop" system — to Champion Feeders of Texas.

And more than 80 pieces of equipment and parts used at the plant, everything from semi-trucks and forklifts to stainless-steel piping and electrical conduit, are for sale through BigIron Auctions.

The online-only auction is set to end June 30.