



## Mittal laying off 700 workers at W.Va. steel mill

6/9/2005, 5:13 p.m. ET

**By VICKI SMITH**  
**The Associated Press**

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (AP) — Mittal Steel Co. is shutting down its only operating blast furnace in West Virginia for eight to 10 weeks, laying off 700 workers at its Weirton mill until business picks up, the company said Thursday.

That's one-third of the current work force at the Northern Panhandle mill and the first layoffs of permanent employees since now-defunct International Steel Group bought the former Weirton Steel Corp. in May 2004.

"I am concerned by this temporary shutdown, but I am not surprised," said Mark Glyptis, president of the 2,100-member Independent Steelworkers Union. "We understand the steel market is going through a gradual slowdown and price decrease. Hopefully, this layoff and partial shutdown of our blast furnace will be short in duration."

Crews will prepare for the outage over the next few days, said Bill Brake, Mittal's executive vice president of operations for the East.

"We'll bring it back up when the market tells us that the time is right," he said.

Mittal had already planned a plantwide vacation for the last week of July. Brake said the remaining Weirton workers will manufacture products using slabs from other Mittal operations.

Word of the layoffs came just days after the furnace was brought back online from a nearly two-week "banking." When a furnace is banked, it's filled with raw materials and kept hot inside so it can be brought back into production quickly. Workers used the down time to repair, clean and paint the mill.

This time, the furnace will sit cold, requiring about a week to restart.

Weirton City Manager Gary DuFour said the summertime layoffs are bad news for business in the town of about 20,000, "and it will be shared not only in this community but throughout the upper Ohio Valley."

"We've gone through quite a bit of transition from Weirton to ISG and now to Mittal, and this has been an ongoing concern," he said.

"The original movement of ownership to ISG was to an American-based holding company. Now it's a worldwide operation ... affected by a worldwide economy," DuFour said. "All we can do is be open to working with Mittal."

Mittal, based in The Netherlands, took control of the Weirton mill in April through a \$4.5 billion deal with ISG of Richfield, Ohio.

ISG formed in 2002 when New York buyout firm WL Ross & Co. bought up steel plants left idled by bankruptcy, including Cleveland's LTV Corp.'s and Pennsylvania's Bethlehem Steel. It won a bidding war for Weirton, the nation's No. 2 tin maker, in bankruptcy court.

Earlier Thursday, Glyptis told The Associated Press that his members were growing nervous in the face of an industrywide slowdown in orders and a backlog of inventory.

"We became the largest American steel company, and now we're part of the largest steel company in the world," he said. "There's some degree of anxiety because we still don't know what's ahead."

However, Glyptis said Louis Schorsch, the president and CEO of Mittal's Ispat Inland Inc., plans to be in Weirton next week, and the company has given the union no reason to think the temporary shutdown will become permanent.

"We're optimistic for a long-term viable industry here in Weirton," he said.

But in February, Lakshmi Mittal told analysts he wants to cut Mittal's work force by about 45,000 jobs, or nearly 30 percent of the combined steelmaker's work force, over five years.

In April, ISG idled operations on the west side of Cleveland, reassigning some 140 workers to training and maintenance duties. A company spokesman said then that production would resume when business picked up, but as of Thursday, that's where they remained.

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On the Net:

Mittal: <http://www.mittalsteel.com/>

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