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What the Coverage of The Doe Run Company Gets Wrong

ST. LOUIS (July 10, 2026) - This month The Doe Run Company reached a global settlement resolving long-running litigation around the La Oroya facility in Peru. As we said in announcing it, we agreed to this resolution to put nearly two decades of litigation behind us and focus on what matters: running our business, serving our customers, and investing in new technologies.

We are and will remain resolute that the claims in the case lacked merit, as proven time and again through years of discovery. And we will continue to defend the integrity of our company and our practices.

But predictably, much of the coverage that followed the announcement repeated the plaintiffs' framing as though it were uncontested. We want to be clear: The settlement ends this litigation, but it does not change the facts. As a whole, the reporting on the case conveys a neatly packaged tale of a company that "poisoned" a Peruvian town and was made to pay for it. It may be a satisfying narrative but in every essential it is both false and woefully incomplete.

The coverage could not even keep straight who was on trial. First Alert told its audience, flatly, that "Doe Run failed to reduce lead emissions at the La Oroya smelter." Bloomberg's account spoke of the corporate family operating the smelter without ever pausing to distinguish parent from subsidiary. Both are wrong in the same way. The Doe Run Company — the Missouri company actually named in this case — never owned, managed, or operated the La Oroya facility. A separate company, Doe Run Peru, did. This was not a footnote to the case; it was the case. The plaintiffs' entire theory required proving that executives in Missouri ran a smelter in the Andes, and after more than a thousand hours combing the record, their own experts could not identify a single operational decision the U.S. parent made about La Oroya. Coverage that cannot tell the parent from the operator has lost the thread of the very story it claims to explain.

Then there is the question the reporting treated as settled and that was never decided at all. Story after story described residents "poisoned" by the smelter as if a court had found as much. None did. There was no verdict, no finding of liability, and — as Reuters alone noted — our company "did not admit wrongdoing." Even that is putting it mildly. In fact, we maintain that Doe Run Peru did more for the people of La Oroya than any of the owners that preceded it.

What actually happened at La Oroya is close to the opposite of the story that was told. The smelter has fouled that valley since 1922. For a quarter-century before Doe Run Peru ever arrived, it was owned and run by the government of Peru itself, which poured emissions into the Mantaro Valley under essentially no controls. Doe Run Peru bought that facility in 1997 and spent more than $300 million — nearly three times what its contract required — modernizing it. Lead emissions from the main stack fell by 74 percent and arsenic by 86 percent. Bloomberg's chosen frame for all of that was that Doe Run Peru "immediately ramped up production," as though that were the damning fact. The plaintiffs' own environmental expert knew better. Under oath, he conceded that the American investors took “an awful, rundown, polluting facility and improved it substantially.”

This is true despite the fact that the legal obligation to remediate that valley’s legacy contamination belonged to the government of Peru, which abdicated it. Where the coverage acknowledged this at all, it surfaced as a grudging clause attributed to “Doe Run” and buried beneath the plaintiffs’ account. And the lawsuit’s own origin got the same soft focus. Plaintiffs’ lead counsel told Reuters it was remarkable that Peruvians could “find their way to an American courtroom.” They did not find their way to an American courtroom, they were brought there by attorneys who recruited them to file lawsuits in the United States. The propriety of litigating claims of Peruvian citizens who claimed injury from emission in Peru in a United States’ court was fought over for nineteen years. The Doe Run Company argued throughout that those claims belonged in a Peruvian court and the United States and Peruvian governments both agreed.

That’s why just days ago, as the trial was set to begin, the United States Department of State filed a statement of interest in federal court urging that these cases be dismissed because they raised, in the government’s own words, “important foreign relations and international comity issues.” Read that again. The United States government — the only party with the authority to say what our trade agreements mean — went into court and asked that this case be thrown out. Of the stories that met the settlement, exactly one, the legal-trade outlet Law.com, bothered to mention it. Readers of the wire and television coverage learned that a case had settled. They were not told that their own government had just informed the court the case did not belong there. That is not a stray detail. It was the most important fact about where this litigation stood, and it is simply absent from much of the public record established by the press.

Strip away the framing, and here is what’s left: This was never a story about a crusading attorney seeking justice for a poor community. It was a story about how no good deed goes unpunished, and how suppositions about “corporate greed” pervade our judiciary and our press to such an extent that the law takes a backseat to hyperbole and fanciful storytelling, rendering the opportunity for a “fair trial” purely theoretical.