

## **EPA REGION 5 PUBLIC HEARING**

March 1, 1999 Uniontown Community Center

Testimony of Greg Coleridge, Director,  
Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee

Good evening. My name is Greg Coleridge. I am the Director of the Economic Justice & Empowerment Program of the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, or AFSC. AFSC is a Quaker social action organization which is founded on, among many principles, the belief in the dignity and worth of every person and to see that of God or good in all human beings -- regardless of income, religion, race, gender, physical ability or where they may live.

Many people who we work with and who support our work live in or near the Industrial Excess Landfill (IEL) in Uniontown, Ohio. For the past 2 1/2 years, we have tried to support the Concerned Citizens of Lake Township (CCLT) and the Lake Township Trustees in their efforts to learn the truth of what is buried at the IEL and, then, take appropriate action to remove the dangers to the community.

I voice my opposition to the proposed changes to the IEL clean-up plan. While it is technically correct to say that these changes are proposed by EPA Region 5, it is probably more a reality to say that these proposals originate with the polluting corporations.

It was, after all, representatives of the polluters who took the lead in both the 1997 and 1998 testing rounds. EPA Region 5 permitted the polluters in '97 to send water samples to their own non-certified labs but wouldn't provide samples to the community. The '98 tests were also led by the polluters with minimal direct oversight by EPA employees. There were no core samples, no testing for radiation, no double-blind tests.

Letting polluting corporations take the lead in testing to determine contamination at IEL, which will affect clean-up plans and the cost of those plans, is like letting the tobacco corporations test to determine whether smoking causes cancer. It makes no sense. It is a fundamental conflict of interest. It provides no checks and balances. It violates the public trust and threatens the public interest.

When did the people turn over our authority to protect public health to private corporations? When did the public give permission to a public agency like EPA to lay down and allow the private interests of corporations to be superior to the public interests of citizens?

Given this public unaccountability over corporations, it is no surprise that test results contradict earlier findings of EPA's own staff (like Linda Kern in 1995), U.S. EPA scientific expert Mary Randolph in 1998, and Ohio EPA staff Larry Antonelli -- who concluded that natural attenuation is not happening and/or should not be considered a clean-up remedy.

What is unclear in all of this is to what extent, up to this point, EPA leadership has fronted for the interests of the polluting corporations and to what extent it has fronted for the U.S. military.

A recent FOIA request I made seeking information of Army dumping at IEL produced a packet of materials containing evidence that the Army did dump something at the IEL in 1970. The packet also showed that the Region sent requests for information on radiation to only 5 Army agencies nationwide -- only 5 out of scores of Army agencies nationwide. Why so few? How hard

did EPA really try to get to the bottom of radiation at IEL?

This is significant since we heard eye-witness testimony several weeks ago when EPA Ombudsman Bob Marin was in Uniontown that vehicles bearing radioactive markings entered the landfill after hours. If there is radiation here, can it naturally attenuate? If so, how many years, decades or centuries will it take? And what do residents do in the meantime?

There is something called the “precautionary principle” that is relevant to this situation. It means that when human health is in doubt, the appropriate response is precaution, not risk. If one is unsure what to do, one doesn’t risk an action that will jeopardize human health in the long term.

The burden of proof falls on the polluters and all others who claim that the toxics at IEL have just disappeared -- which even their 1998 data results for benzene and more than a dozen other chemicals do not.

Finally, I would like to present a letter. Actually it is a FOIA request. I kindly ask that it be forward to Wendy Schumacher, FOIA officer at Region 5. It requests a document that a Region 5 staffperson who I spoke to said Mr. Timothy Thurlow, Region 5 lawyer over IEL, now possess. From what I was told, the document shows that the Army sought guidance from U.S.EPA to release information it possessed on radiation at IEL. The EPA staffperson said the U.S. EPA forwarded the request to Mr. Thurlow. The EPA staffperson also said the document made reference by the Army to withhold a portion of what it had on this topic of radiation at the IEL.

I am certain that the public here would very much like to know about this and all other related documents. I look forward a response by Region 5 within the next two weeks -- as the law stipulates.

Thank you.