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## **Cleanup proposal outlined at dump**

### **U.S. EPA's third plan for Uniontown landfill urges natural cleansing**

By Bob Downing

Beacon Journal staff writer

UNIONTOWN - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency yesterday unveiled a revised cleanup plan for a closed toxic waste dump in Stark County.

The cleanup plan -- the agency's third -- calls for planting more trees and other vegetation to allow natural cleansing of contaminants in the groundwater at the 30-acre Industrial Excess Landfill off Cleveland Avenue Northwest.

It calls for upgrading the groundwater monitoring system and working to eliminate a benzene problem in the water under the dump. Studies also would be conducted to determine whether the site might be used as a nature preserve with public access in the future.

The new remedy, with a \$7 million price tag, does not require installation of a \$9 million synthetic-earthen cap and a pump-and-treat system for the contaminated aquifer -- two key elements of the original federal cleanup plan announced in 1989 and modified in March 2000.

The EPA said this new plan is being considered because the groundwater at the dump is improving and because there is strong local interest in a cleanup remedy that would permit more flexible land use.

The four companies being held liable for the cleanup -- Goodyear, Bridgestone/Firestone, B.F. Goodrich and GenCorp. -- have supported naturally cleaning the dump through vegetation.

Paul Wolford, a spokesman for the companies, could not be reached yesterday for comment.

Lake Township Trustee Sue Ruley called the news from the EPA ``expected and no big surprise."

The township still has some minor concerns but has been assured by federal and state officials that the natural cleanup should work, Ruley said.

Chris Borello of the Concerned Citizens of Lake Township, a grass-roots group, expressed dismay that the EPA was proceeding with what she called ``a blue-light special... a non-cleanup."

Her organization intends to continue fighting for a more thorough and safer cleanup, she said.

Concerned Citizens believes radioactive material was buried at the dump, though federal officials have repeatedly said there is no evidence of this.

The previous plan -- from March 2000 -- calls for installation of a synthetic-earthen cap, expanding the methane venting system that collects the explosive gas produced by decaying garbage, letting the groundwater cleanse itself through natural processes, monitoring the aquifer, installing fencing, continuing to monitor contamination and placing deed restrictions on the future use of the site. It has a \$13.6 million price tag.

#### **A different plan**

In July 2000, the rubber companies asked the EPA if it would consider a different cleanup plan and the agency agreed to do so. In November 2000, the rubber companies submitted that plan and the EPA found that it warranted further analysis.

What the EPA is now proposing to do requires amending the record of decision, the binding federal cleanup plan. Public meetings will be held this month in Uniontown, and public comment will be accepted until mid-May.

Also being studied is a ``no further action" option. That calls for fencing the site and operating a methane-venting system.

The cost: \$390,000.

Federal officials said the next step will be to design the cleanup remedy with construction taking one construction season, perhaps in 2003 or 2004.

The dump received 1 million gallons of toxic waste from rubber companies and an estimated 750,000 tons of trash before it closed in 1980.

The initial cleanup plan from 1989 carried a \$25 million price tag and called for the polluted groundwater -- up to 255 million gallons -- to be pumped to the surface, where certain toxic chemicals would be removed.

Fewer contaminants

The EPA said groundwater at the Uniontown dump is getting cleaner.

Where 80 contaminants were once found, only 13 are now showing up in groundwater tests and the concentration of certain toxic heavy metals is declining, the agency said.

Of 13 volatile organic compounds (VOCs), only three -- benzene, vinyl chloride and 1-2 dichloroethane -- exceed federal drinking-water limits in on-site monitoring wells.

The key element of the new plan is to "transform contamination within the landfill," not to contain the contamination as was the main strategy of the March 2000 changes, the EPA said.

The agency said bacteria, fungi and yeast will break down organic contaminants into smaller, less-harmful products and eliminate or reduce the pollution problem in a process called natural attenuation.

The agency admitted it has little experience using such methods on a large scale at a Superfund site, but it appears that the use of trees and vegetation will work.

The revised plan protects human health and the environment, complies with federal and state requirements and is cost-effective, the EPA said.

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Bob Downing can be reached at 330-996-3745 or [bdowning@thebeaconjournal.com](mailto:bdowning@thebeaconjournal.com)