

Lake residents discuss plan to plant trees

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LAKE TWP. -- About 125 people gave a largely hostile reception to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposal to let natural processes break down the waste at the Industrial Excess Landfill just south of Uniontown. The public hearing lasted nearly four hours. Support for the plan came from Township Trustee Sue Ruley, township geology consultant Tom Shalala and members of Lake Township's Community Advisory Group. The group was established by a grant from the EPA and is supposed to gather community input on future use of the site. Opponents included grass-roots Concerned Citizens of Lake Township, and members of other area environmental groups who came to protest what several people referred to as a "do-nothing" remedy. A number of residents who claimed no affiliation also questioned or opposed the plan. Numerous speakers commented that no decision should be made on a cleanup until national ombudsman Robert Martin is allowed to complete an investigation into the EPA's handling of the landfill and until the possibility of radioactive, egg-shaped objects in the landfill is resolved.

"I want to apologize to everybody in Uniontown for even starting this landfill," former landfill owner-operator Charles Kittinger told the crowd. But he noted that the agencies who gave him permits, such as township zoning and the Stark County Health Department, enabled the pollution to take place.

David Kidd, founder of Canton's Free Tree Program, said the decision was one of the most difficult he has had to make — but he does not support planting trees at the landfill.

Mary Grimmett, Trent, a longtime citizens' activist from Cuyahoga Falls, said that in her research into the Wingfoot Lake facility (a Department of Defense waste site), she discovered that waste was shipped to IEL during times of radiation experiments. She called for more radiation tests.

Marcia Maslonek, a biologist with Wildlife Habitat Council who has worked with the township and the companies paying for the cleanup, said that a natural vegetation cover is preferable to sealing the landfill waste under the ground. "It's not surprise to me that nature can take care of herself ... better than man can in this case," Maslonek said.

The Project On Government Oversight, a Washington, D.C.-based watchdog group, had a statement read into the record and called phytoremediation "premature" because of controversy at the site and "the deadly consequences that would result if the EPA is wrong in its stance."

In support of phytoremediation, Community Advisory Group president Dan Clay cited the Bible, saying, "Man has dominion over the earth. Man hasn't done a very good job in this case. I think it's time to give Mother Nature a chance."

Uniontown resident and registered nurse Darleen Lansing has spent several years compiling a register of health problems in families living around the landfill. She has more than 100 names to date of people living within a mile of the landfill.

American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker-related social action organization, opposed the proposal on three points outlined by Joe Mosyjowski: phytoremediation is unproven at sites like IEL, not all information about the landfill has been released to the public, and the polluters have been in charge of testing and promoted this plan.

Residents can submit comments in writing through May 17. U.S. EPA must respond to the comments in a document called a "responsiveness summary."

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