

Canton Repository Editorial - 4/22/02
Agency has little to back up its claim

It's no wonder the EPA officials who ran Thursday's public hearing on cleanup of the Industrial Excess Landfill looked so uneasy when the criticism started, and continued for more than three hours. The agency had claimed it had a handle on the prevailing public opinion, but last week it discovered how wrong it might be.

The experience should encourage federal officials to scientifically gauge the wishes and concerns of residents who live near Superfund sites. Environmental Protection Agency officials have said that public opinion is one of nine factors it uses to decide how to clean up toxic pollution. Before the hearing, they thought there was widespread support in Lake Township for a plan to let trees and other plants detoxify the Uniontown landfill. But almost everyone who spoke at the hearing thought otherwise.

That's not to say the majority in Lake Township believes as the vocal critics do. But the EPA doesn't know one way or the other. The agency has relied on the township trustees and a survey paid for by the four companies that helped to pollute the IEL site. Because the companies will pay for the cleanup, they have reason to want residents to favor the cheapest solution, and that's the solution their survey found residents do favor. Public opinion should not be as important as sound science. But if EPA is going to claim it factors public opinion into its decisions, it should use scientific methods to figure out what the public wants, and should be honest about how that fits into its final decision.

This page was created April 22, 2002
Copyright ©2002 The Repository