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Uniontown dump raises concerns

Group finds evidence of radiation issues, fears ground water contamination

By Bob Downing

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UNIONTOWN - A grass-roots group, still troubled by the possibility of man-made radiation in a now-closed toxic waste dump, wants two federal agencies to get involved.

The Concerned Citizens of Lake Township is urging the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Defense Department to oversee the 30-acre Industrial Excess Landfill off Cleveland Avenue Northwest, said spokeswoman Chris Borello.

She said those agencies should assume control of the site from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency because of their expertise in radiation issues.

She also said that more needs to be done to control contaminated ground water in and around Uniontown.

Contamination is continuing to be flushed from the one-time sand and gravel pit into the ground water and there are still serious radiation issues, Borello told 60 people attending a public forum on Tuesday night.

Those findings were among the results of analysis by four experts hired by Borello's group with a \$50,000 federal grant and presented to the public for the first time.

"It's very clear why in good conscience we cannot walk away from this site because of what we know," she told the audience. "The more we've learned over the years, the greater the concern."

Terry Witsaman of the citizens group likened the new review to an individual getting a second opinion on a medical problem.

The monitoring well system around the old dumps needs to be reinstalled so that a troubling water problem can be analyzed further, said Julie Weatherington Rice of Bennett & Williams, a Columbus-based environmental consulting firm.

The acidity and alkalinity of the wells on and around the landfill vary greatly and the acid level of some samples is a thousand times greater than levels in water, she said.

It is a mystery issue that was first raised with the U.S. EPA in 1999, but the agency never addressed those concerns, she said.

It could be a troublesome issue because some toxic heavy metals, including lead and arsenic, are soluble and move more freely in water that is more alkaline and that threatens nearby ground water, she said.

Dr. Mark Baskaran, a professor of geochemistry at Wayne State University in Detroit, cautioned that the Uniontown dump may have radiation problems.

If the radiation test results are accurate, there could be radioactive waste buried in the dump, he said.

There are possible troublesome levels of plutonium, tritium and technetium-99, and the levels appear to show that the radiation is not naturally occurring, he said.

It appears that the tritium and plutonium could be coming from buried deposits, he said.

The U.S. EPA and the Ohio EPA have both repeatedly said they do not believe that radiation is an issue at the Uniontown dump. They have also reported that the ground water is getting cleaner.

Borello's group has posted the reports at a new Web site: www.northcanton.com/iel/index.htm.

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