

Companies say landfill poses no threat to human health

By KELLY HILL Repository staff writer

Repository / Scott Heckel

WELL TESTING. Zeke Secore and Steve Giere, both of Sharp and Associates, prepare to tap Well 11-I at the perimeter of the Industrial Excess Landfill in Uniontown on Thursday. The results of the tests are expected within about six weeks.

LAKE TWP. — The companies responsible for cleaning up the polluted Industrial Excess Landfill maintain that the site is no threat to human health and with one exception, on-site ground-water quality is improving. The potentially responsible parties — Goodyear, B.F. Goodrich, Bridgestone/Firestone and GenCorp— held a press conference Thursday afternoon to discuss the last four rounds of quarterly testing. As expected, the companies confirmed that no further radiation testing is scheduled for the site. Although small amounts of radioactive substances turned up in tests, a health physicist hired by the companies, Dr. John Frazier, asserted that the levels are no different from those found in any other northeast Ohio water or soil. “It’s not there,” Frazier said. “It’s a nonproblem.”

Local environmental and watchdog groups disagree with that interpretation of the test results and the decision to discontinue radiation tests. “If you don’t look for something, you won’t find it,” said Greg Coleridge, director of economic justice for the Northeast Ohio chapter of the watchdog group American Friends Service Committee. “One way they will never find radiation in the future is not to test for it.”

The radiation test results were based on 54 wells sampled in August 2000; seven wells in December 2000; eight wells in March 2001 and 10 wells in May and June. However, township officials are more concerned about the gasoline-related compound benzene, which has been found at the landfill at levels as high as 5,000 times the drinking water standard. Benzene tested at 1,100 parts per billion and higher since last August in three wells near the center of the landfill. The maximum contaminant level is 5 parts per billion. Joseph Towarnicky, project manager for Sharp and Associates, felt that the benzene might be from a small source near the wells that had migrated downward due to settling at the landfill. Township officials recently went to Chicago to ask U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials to make the benzene plume a priority. Company officials said they would continue to monitor the benzene and said it might be readily cleaned up by using bacteria or exposing the chemical to oxygen, causing it to evaporate.

As far as the companies’ assertion that the landfill does not pose a threat to human health, environmental groups don’t agree. “It is an assertion,” Coleridge said of the companies’ stance. “And they obviously have a self-interest for that to be the case.”

“I think that’s so contradictory it’s criminal,” said Christine Borello, president of the Concerned Citizens of Lake Township. “On one hand, they have benzene, a known carcinogen ... exceeding federal drinking water standards by 5,000 times over the federal limit. “They say the dump is not dangerous. That is certainly not the opinion of many independent individuals,” she said.
