

Posted on Friday, October 03, 2003

33 wells to close at dump

EPA plans to abandon some Uniontown monitoring sites. Group wants more tests

By Bob Downing, Beacon Journal staff writer

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to abandon 33 of 58 monitoring wells around a closed toxic waste dump in Uniontown, much to the chagrin of a grass-roots group.

The agency will add five new wells at the Industrial Excess Landfill, resulting in a total of 30 wells on and around the dump off Cleveland Avenue Northwest.

The agency is satisfied the number of wells is sufficient to determine what contamination might be in the aquifer under the dump and in what concentrations and whether such pollution is moving, said EPA project manager Tim Fischer.

Thirty wells is "quite a few for a 30-acre site... and we feel that we're erring on the cautious side," said EPA spokesman Mick Hans. "It's not a skimpy plan."

But Concerned Citizens of Lake Township is not happy with abandoning wells. That action is part of the final design plan for the dump, a document the EPA's regional office in Chicago approved Monday and announced Thursday.

It was prepared by a consulting firm for the four companies being held liable for the dump: B.F. Goodrich, Bridgestone/Firestone, Goodyear and GenCorp.

"This is going to be the battle to end all battles," said CCLT spokeswoman Chris Borello.

Her group wants the EPA to maintain all 58 wells and has asked Michael Cook, head of the EPA's Superfund program in Washington, D.C., to block plans to abandon the 33 wells next spring, she said.

Her group wants additional independent water tests, citing concerns over methods the EPA used and whether the water results are valid, she said.

Keeping all the wells is crucial to determining if allowing the aquifer to cleanse itself is working. Without the wells, the aquifer is at risk, Borello said.

"We're not getting a cleanup. We're only getting passive monitoring. We're abandoning wells because the polluters say it's OK. What's wrong with that picture?" she said.

The EPA plan also calls for the tire companies to conduct eight rounds of ground water sampling by September 2006. Fencing around the landfill must be improved.

A risk assessment will be conducted to determine how much hazard there might be in allowing people on the site. That could help determine future uses of the dump and nearby areas as a nature preserve or park, Fischer said.

The EPA will also conduct a review of the natural cleansing in 2006 to make sure it is working.

The latest EPA plan for the Uniontown site -- it's the agency's third plan and has a \$7 million price tag -- calls for planting more trees next year and allowing the contaminated aquifer to

cleanse itself. The toxic wastes in the dump will not be removed. The contaminated aquifer will be monitored. The system to collect explosive methane gas will be retained.

More trees and shrubs will keep the top of the earthen cap from eroding and will reduce the amount of rain and snow that comes in contact with buried toxic chemicals.

The tire companies have suggested that a nature preserve be created -- with no public access. Lake Township is considering a park around the dump.

Bob Downing can be reached at 330-996-3745 or bdowning@thebeaconjournal.com