

Toxic site will be fenced in

13.3.12

EPA

By RICK HOMANS
Times staff PAGE ONE

SALEM — Although Salem Acres has made the federal toxic waste Superfund list, Environmental Protection Agency officials said last night the site isn't considered an "emergency situation" and cleanup funding may be eliminated from next year's budget.

During a heated meeting at Salem City Hall among residents of Salem, Peabody, city, state and federal officials, the director of the South Essex Sewerage District also announced a contract to fence the 162-acre waste site will be awarded on March 20.

SESD used the sight of dumping sludge.

SESD Director James Vitale said construction of the six-foot high, chain link fence, which will be topped with barbed wire, would start in early April and be completed in 40 days.

Vitale, however, said SESD's participation in the fencing was not an admission of liability. He said the sewer agency is trying to locate other companies which dumped at the site after SESD stopped hauling sludge there in 1969.

Salem city councilors warned if the area is not fenced off by June 1, the city would do the project itself and bill SESD for it.

Unofficial estimates of the cost of the fence have started at \$100,000, according to a SESD official.

Heather Ford, chief of the federal Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Enforcement Section, said money to start cleaning up the site is in the proposed 1985-1986 budget but could be cut by the time the budget is approved by Congress.

"It will be looked at against all other projects," she said. "I anticipate it will be done, but I can't promise."

Ford said 53 New England hazardous waste locations are on the Superfund list and some are contaminating groundwater, unlike the Salem Acres site, she said.

"Those are the priorities," she said. "In risk management, that's where the money will go."

This May will mark the five-month anniversary of the discovery of the Salem Acres site, one-quarter mile west of Route 107 in Salem, near the Peabody line.

Even after protests from neighborhood residents, led by Debbi Alexander, of 75 Marlborough Road, Salem, a fence has yet to be constructed to prevent children and other residents from wandering into the area.

State Sen. Fred Berry (D-Peabody) said the delay was "as quick as government works. It's sad to say

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EPA, page A10

MAR 6 1985 18

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Superfund Records Center
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EPA funding may be delayed

Continued from page A1

and it's an indictment of the whole system," he said.

"I'd like to smack someone," said state Rep. Michael Ruane, D-Salem, of the delay. "If you have an emergency situation and you label it as dangerous, this demands immediate attention."

"For the protection of the people of my city, put up that fence," Ruane told federal and state environmental officials.

"I've got two little children and you can bet I'm frustrated," Alexander said. "I don't want to become a health statistic."

The site, nominated for the Superfund list in October, contains five sewage and industrial waste pits with traces of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chromium, arsenic, acetone, methylene chloride and pesticides.

But Steve Johnson, an environmental analyst with the state Department of Environmental Department of Quality Engineering, said concentrations of PCBs

and other chemicals are below the level considered to be hazardous.

"I don't want to sound like I'm making excuses, but it is ranked on the Superfund list because of potential concern," Johnson said. "The levels we found are not hazardous, but they alarmed us."

However, Alexander told Johnson groundwater is seeping into her basement and she suggested a nearby spring water bottling plant operated by the Delisio Brothers Garden Center in Swampscott may be affected by the waste.

Johnson said he would alert his boss to the concerns and indicated he would perform tests. He said if ground water were contaminated or if the bottled water were affected "that would change the picture dramatically."

The SESD dumped sludge at Salem Acres from 1947 to 1969 when the land was sold. The new owner has said he did not permit any more dumping at the site but officials have found traces of additional dumping after 1969.