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EPA reveals cleanup one clean up plan option, more to follow

By: Tristram DeRoma , Editor

Officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection had its first meeting with the public Wednesday, one of the many meetings that will be held in the summer to help explain to residents how they're going to once and for all deal with the toxic waste left behind by a brake manufacturing company that closed up in the 1990s.

The company, Raymark, manufactured "automotive brakes, clutch parts and other friction components, primarily for the automotive industry," according to a press release from the EPA.

During its lifespan, from 1919 to 1989, the company discarded its waste through free construction fill.

In the 1990, the EPA and DEP realized that much of that waste was toxic, (asbestos) and later tests done by the agencies revealed "at a minimum" 46 residential properties and "numerous commercial and municipal properties" were affected.

Through the years, the EPA and DEP worked with the town and its residents on solutions.

Wednesday night was just the first meeting of many where the EPA and DEP will share its solutions on the options it came up with as a direct result of its collaboration. Pictures and diagrams were set up regarding the EPA and CTDEP's disposal plans, and residents were free to talk with and questions CTDEP and EPA officials that were also there.

"It's important that individuals be equally informed of any project of this nature," said Patrick Bowe, director of the CTDEP's Remedial Division. Though the CTDEP and EPA has worked almost exclusively with the "Raymark Advisory Committee," a select group of citizens and businessmen directly affected by the waste, Bowe said everyone who came to the meeting should be assured that the two agencies will value their input too. "They can certainly e-mail us, fill out forms we have here, we are here to listen to and respect their concerns," Bowe said.

This week's meeting was about the agencies' plan to take the waste from the above mentioned properties and put it where there is already a high amount of waste: the Raybestos Memorial Ballfield, a site that has been closed to the public since the 1990s.

Many people, including those on the RAC, were there to oppose this plan. Many of the residents live near the ball field, which is hemmed in by Frog Pond Lane, Patterson and Clinton avenues.

Although the CTDEP and EPA presented other options at the meeting, RAC members, because of their extended involvement with the two agencies, were pretty much resigned to the fact that the consolidation plan is going to happen.

Paul Rohaly, a RAC member, is one of those people. As a resident who lives on Patterson Avenue, he has been one of many who abdicated leaving the waste where it is on the properties and isolating it. He and others have said the plan by digging the material up again and transporting it across town in open dump trucks to the ball field could release contamination into the air, defeating the purpose of consolidation, protecting the public's health.

"Why let the genie out of the bottle?," Rohaly said.

Jim Murphy, community involvement coordinator with the EPA, said there are plenty of reasons why they should consolidate the waste at the ball field.

"We have \$20 million to take care of this waste," he said. "If nothing gets done, the money will go away and you'll be stuck with this for many more years," he told a group of residents at the meeting.

He also said he understood people's concerns about the logistics of the operation, but he assured them that they will be keeping the dust down by wetting the soil and monitoring the air quality.

But residents were still thrown by the numbers of the operation.

According to the EPA's own figures, the consolidation process is going to take about two to three years and 5,000 dump-truck loads of soil, which equals about 65,000 cubic yards of waste, plus another 35,000 cubic yards of "clean soil that will go on top of it.

"When you look at this objectively, it is an unmitigated disaster for the property owners, the people impacted near wherever they dump material and the Town of Stratford," said three members of the RAC through a written statement, signed by Bob Osborne, Charles Perez and Ronald Mazzei. "The efforts of the USEPA and CTDEP continue to be "a perfect storm" of shortsighted ignorance and the continuing long term negative impact on the environment and the public health of the residents of Stratford caused by the USEPA."

Even if the transport of the waste goes off without a hitch, some residents at the meeting, who live next to the ball field said that's little comfort. Some took issue with the fact that after the EPA adds the additional waste and caps it, they plan to open it as a park.

"Why?, said resident Erin Holroyd, who also writes for this paper, said. "So 12 years from now my kid gets cancer?"

One resident, Jim Mihaley, offered up another plan that he said may satisfy everyone. His plan would involve the town taking over some of the properties using eminent domain and save many residents a lot of worry and concern. The plan, he said would save the EPA money as well as the residents some grief.

The next schedule of meetings will be Aug. 7 at St. Joseph's Church. At this meeting, the other option, taking the waste to the Stratford landfill, near Short Beach, will be discussed. The meeting will start at 6:30 p.m. The last meeting will be Aug. 8 at the Baldwin Center, 1000 Broad St. That meeting will focus on the consolidating the waste at Ferry Creek.

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