

Clinton West cleanup debated

Neighbors want process held to higher standard

By Krisy Gashler • kgashler@gannett.com • March 11, 2010, 7:10 pm

The message was loud and clear, state officials said: neighbors of Clinton West Plaza want the site cleaned to the highest residential standard -- not the restricted commercial standard currently proposed.

The state Department of Environmental [Conservation](#) hosted a meeting Wednesday night to explain and answer questions about its draft cleanup plan for Clinton West. Historic leaks of dry-cleaning fluid left a pool of contaminated groundwater at the southwest corner of the property, between Clinton West Laundry and homes along North Titus Avenue.

The DEC is proposing to have the property owner inject a chemical oxidant and then a carbon source into the contaminated groundwater to speed the breakdown of carcinogenic chemicals such as tetrachloroethene, also known as PCE or PERC. DEC Project Manager Gary Priscott estimated the remedy could clean up the site "in five years or less."

Approximately 20 people attended the DEC meeting, where questions focused on effectiveness of the chosen remedy, the possibility of impacts on people or Six Mile Creek, and why the state wasn't requiring residential cleanup standards.

The proposed remedies have been used effectively across the state for decades, Priscott said. The fact that PERC was found alongside six of its breakdown components shows the contamination is already breaking down on its own, he said.

Because the site is paved and no one drinks the groundwater, "from a human health exposure perspective, this site poses no risks," said [state Department](#) of Health engineer Susan Shearer.

Soil on the site is not contaminated, but groundwater is, Priscott said. The goal is to reduce chemical contamination in the groundwater to state standards -- 5 parts per billion for PERC and 5 or lower for breakdown components, he said.

The highest PERC reading on site was 1,600 parts per billion.

Neighbors, [Toxics Targeting President Walter Hang](#), and both Common Council representatives of the area, J.R. Clairborne, D-2nd, and Eric Rosario, I-2nd, all [asked that the state require cleanup to residential, not commercial standards.](#)

"Why, if this treatment is going to [work](#) so well, would you restrict future use to commercial only?" Rosario said.

The southern part of the site -- near the pooled contamination -- is already residential, noted Cleveland Avenue neighbor Lynne Jackier.

At the end of the meeting DEC engineer Gregg Townsend said residents had made it clear that they want unrestricted, residential cleanup standards. As DEC staff respond to comments on their plan, "that is something we will look at first and foremost," he said.

The public comment deadline on the Clinton West plan has been extended to April 2. Copies of the full plan are available at the Tompkins County Public Library, and at www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/62339.html.