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Local News - Thursday, August 5, 2004

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## Emerson may test 32 homes

**ROGER DUPUIS II**

Journal Staff

ITHACA -- Thirty-two homes have been pinpointed as likely candidates for indoor air and soil gas testing in neighborhoods affected by pollution around Emerson Power Transmission's plant.

"We want to do this as quickly as possible," Emerson Environmental Affairs Director Derek Chase said of the residential testing.

That news was among many issues discussed at two public information sessions Wednesday aimed at helping residents understand



IRINA PERESS/Journal Staff

**Ithaca resident David Watkins asks state health and environmental conservation officials whether they live in the area affected by chemical pollution from the Emerson Power Transmission Plant during the meeting Thursday afternoon at the Tompkins County Public Library. Approximately 40 residents attended the meeting.**



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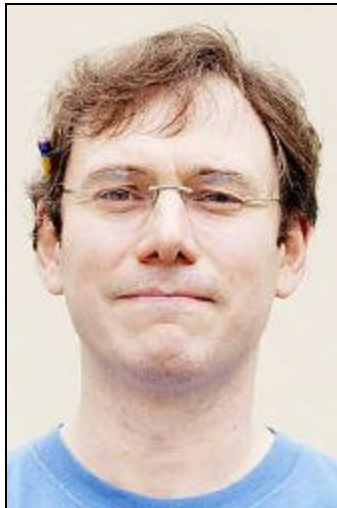
pollution issues in their neighborhood, and how Emerson and state agencies are dealing with the contamination. It appears the indoor testing could start as early as September.

The designated properties are primarily around West Spencer Street, South Cayuga Street and South Hill Terrace, with maps showing the targeted area extending to parts of Hillview Place and South Titus Avenue. They were named by Emerson as part of a proposal submitted to state officials this week.

Non-residential soil vapor, or "vadose zone," testing downhill from the Emerson plant in June detected evidence of trichloroethylene (TCE) and related chemicals cis-1,2-dichloroethene, tetrachloroethene and 1,1,1-trichloroethane in sampling at nine sites on June 17. TCE, an organic solvent, was used at the plant under former



**Criscitell**



**Hartman**



**Perlgut**

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owners until 1983.

The presence of "elevated levels of several chemical compounds" in soil gas "warrant (s) further investigation both near and inside residences," according to a state Department of Environmental Conservation bulletin.

Chase said the target area for home testing was chosen based on analysis of results from the June soil vapor tests, particularly in the case of results from wells on South Cayuga Street and South Hill Terrace.

The DEC and state Health Department must approve Emerson's proposal before it can move forward. DEC Region 7 Engineer Mary Jane Peachey said that review process could take one to two weeks.

Individual homeowners' approval is required for household testing to proceed. Chase said some

## Testing results

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## Citizens speak out about Emerson issue

George P. Ferrari, Jr.

327 South Geneva St.

Q: Why did you attend today's sessions?

A: As executive director of Catholic Charities, certainly one of the issues we're always concerned about is the ecological health of our community and the responsiveness of businesses and government to the good stewardship of the environment.

Q: What should be the outcome of today's sessions?

A: I hope the health department and the DEC understand the very real concerns that have been expressed here today.

John Criscitello

401 S. Cayuga St.

Question: What's your major concern about the spill?

Answer: As a homeowner I am worried. I have a family with two young children. So for my family, health is definitely upmost on my mind. Also, I am worried about the falling property value because of the contamination level that may be there.

Q: How do you think Morse Chain can best address this problem?

A: I don't know ... but fingers will be pointed very soon, so sooner the better.

Q: How do you judge the extent of the spill problem?

A: Today's meeting is just the beginning, so there is a whole lot to go through and as a homeowner I would like to know more.

Walter Hartman

222 Wood St.

Q: What did you think of the answers you heard from officials today?

residents have already said yes, and more sign-ups may have resulted from Wednesday's meetings. Once the state approves Emerson's plans, Chase said the company will send mailings to designated households to seek permission from those who have not already granted it.

A: I feel like some of the things (concerns) were dismissed. The health risks were kind of ignored.

Sue Perlgut

Plain & Albany streets

Q: Why did you attend today's sessions?

A: I'm here today as a concerned citizen and as a member of the South of the Creek Neighborhood Association.

Q: What do you think of the testing plans?

A: We're concerned that the testing that is going on is not going to be sufficient, and they're not going to be testing as broad an area as they should. They should cast a wider net with the testing.

Homeowners may refuse the request, though more people seem to be clamoring for testing than resisting it. Several residents living outside the initial testing area said they hope Emerson and the state will include them in the process. Turner Place resident Earl Andrews was among them. Officials told him his street might be included in a second round of testing.

"If we see a reason to sample, we will sample your home," Peachey told people from outlying areas. "We can't just do everyone because they want us to." She explained that the criterion is that the homes have some evidence of having been impacted by the pollution.

For the first set of homes, plans are for separate sets of warm weather testing and cold weather testing, the latter slated for this winter. The different types are needed due to differences in air flow patterns given temperature changes and ventilation in homes from season to season. "If the data tell us unacceptable levels are in the homes, they need to get mitigated," DEC's Peachey said. "Right now we're looking at Emerson to do that. If they don't, we will."

Chase stressed Emerson's determination to stay the course.

"We accept our responsibility," he said. "We're committed to our responsibility."

According to a state Health Department report, mitigation can take a number of forms. Those may include sealing cracks in the building's foundation, or adjusting the the heating and cooling systems so pressure keeps subsurface vapors out. Another option is installing a "sub-slab depressurization system." Similar to radon remediation systems, those use low level suction below the foundation to prevent vapors entering from below.

"We're going to let the data guide us," Peachey said of pegging future testing areas. "We're going to get the science and proceed from there.

"We will go out and continue the sampling until we find nothing," she added.

If the sampling plans were laid out fairly clearly, many residents were less than pleased with the responses they received to other questions, including

the potential health hazards of TCE and related substances.

"Most of the information we have on health consequences of exposure to these (substances) are occupational exposures, and they're very common," said Henriette Hamel, a Syracuse-based regional toxins coordinator for the state Health Department. "We don't know what long long exposures ... to very very slight quantities cause," she said.

"What we're trying to tell you," Hamel added, "is that at the levels we're probably finding in indoor air here, you would probably not see demonstrable health effects."

According to the Centers for Disease Control, breathing small amounts may cause headaches, lung irritation, dizziness, poor coordination, and difficulty concentrating. Breathing large amounts of trichloroethylene may cause impaired heart function, unconsciousness, and death. Breathing it for long periods may cause nerve, kidney, and liver damage.

Erika Williams has lived on Hillview Terrace her whole life. She recalled a childhood dog used to go swimming in areas around the factory and often came home soaked in oily and greasy residue. The dog later died of cancer.

Andrews, of Turner Place, said he suffers from a viral heart ailment which doctors never satisfactorily diagnosed.

Hamel told residents that information collected during the testing could lead to more in-depth health risk analysis.

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