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Opinion - Thursday, April 21, 2005

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A brief history of the Emerson Power Transmission site

1928 - 1983: Borg Warner owns the company and building on Aurora Street known as Morse Chain, which manufactures automotive components. Prior to 1983, Morse Industrial uses the solvent trichlorethene, or TCE, to degrease metal parts.

1983: The plant is purchased by Emerson and becomes Emerson Power Transmission.

1987: Investigations reveal TCE has leaked into soil and groundwater from an underground fire water reservoir on the property. Emerson reports the spill to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

1988: Emerson enters into a consent order with the DEC to conduct a remedial investigation and clean-up feasibility study. These are completed in 1990 and 1994, respectively.

1994: Final groundwater remediation plan approved by the DEC.

1996: An upgrade and expansion of the remediation system approved in 1990 is completed.

2003: According to Emerson, company officials meet with DEC to discuss implementing a plan for additional vadose zone testing. DEC approves plan in Feb. 2004.

April 2004: In response to neighbors concerns Ithaca Mayor Carolyn Peterson orders soil testing around a road project downhill from the spillsite. The tests come back negative.

May, June 2004: Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting, calls on DEC to reopen the spill case, citing statistics he says demonstrate that the remediation system is not effective. Vadose zone testing is done in neighborhoods around the plant.

July 2004: Vadose zone tests are made public. TCE and other site-related

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chemicals found. The DEC asks Emerson to provide a proposal for additional clean-up measures and indoor air quality testing in area homes.

August 2004: The first public meeting is held to answer questions about chemicals, test results and next steps.

Oct. and Nov. 2004: 49 homes are tested for airborne site-related chemicals in Phase I.

Jan. 2005: The test area expands to include seven more homes in what officials call Phase II.

Feb. 2005: The Emerson site is reclassified from a Class 4 to a Class 2, meaning the DEC determined hazardous waste from the site constitutes a significant threat to the environment.

March 2005: A public meeting is held by the DEC and Department of Health to share analysis of the first round of indoor air tests. Officials say once they have results for the second round of tests, which included homes in Phases I and II, further testing is expected in a wider area and on-site.

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Originally published Thursday, April 21, 2005

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