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by  
**JAKE GRAZIANO**

Local News - Thursday, May 20, 2004

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## Emerson clean-up raises questions

By **Roger DuPuis II**  
Journal Staff

ITHACA -- A spokesman for Emerson Power Transmission on Wednesday said the company has worked closely with regulatory officials to insure that decades-old toxic spillage at the site is properly cleaned up.

"Emerson takes environmental issues very seriously, and we have been working diligently with the state of New York concerning environmental issues that have been raised at the Emerson Power Transmission site in Ithaca," said Emerson spokesman Dave Baldrige.

The factory on Danby Road -- formerly Morse Chain -- has been in operation since 1906. Trichloroethylene, or TCE -- a toxic solvent -- was used until 1983 to degrease the power transmission chains made at the plant. In 1987, TCE was found to have leaked into the surrounding soil and groundwater.

Walter Hang, president of Ithaca-based Toxics Targeting, says that's not enough.

"Hundreds of citizens living and working near Emerson Power Transmission could be threatened by toxic hazards that were identified in 1987," Hang said. "The (state) Department of Environmental Conservation's failure to clean up Emerson Power Transmission for nearly two decades calls into question the agency's ability to safeguard the environment and public health."

Hang held a press conference Wednesday in a city neighborhood that may have been affected by the spread of chemicals leaking downhill from the plant. He said that a groundwater treatment system installed by Emerson in the 1990s, in accordance with a DEC mandate, has not been effective in removing toxins from the soil.

Citing information from a consultant's study prepared for Emerson, Hang said groundwater at the site are 5,600 times higher than permitted under New York clean-up standards, and could pose a threat to nearby homes.

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New York's standard for TCE is five-parts-per-billion in groundwater. The study prepared for Emerson showed levels as high as 28,000 parts per billion as recently as December 2003. During eight years of operation, Hang said, the remediation system has only recovered 16 gallons of TCE. At peak in the late 1970s, the factory was using up to 1,200 gallons of the solvent per week.

DEC officials on Wednesday did not immediately return a Journal inquiry seeking comment in response to Hang's statements.

"The remediation system that Emerson has implemented meets the requirements of the 1994 record of decision from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation," Emerson's Baldrige said.

Hang would like to see the DEC upgrade the spill site to active status. He also would like to see the agency require an indoor air pollution control system in local homes, similar to one used in Endicott in response to solvent contamination concerns around a former IBM plant there.

"In addressing the air quality issues set out in the record of decision, Emerson has done site work and also submitted another work plan to monitor soil gas in the soil layer above the water table, which has received approval from the New York Department of Health as well as the Department of Environmental Conservation," Baldrige said. "We are now prepared to move onto the next phase of these procedures, which includes installing monitoring wells designed to take soil gas samples."

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