

ITHACA TIMES

Vol. XXII. No. 51 / Our Twenty Sixth Year / August 3, 2000

Walter Hang battles for lead clean-up in Fall Creek

Perhaps the most recent chapter on an undisclosed hazardous waste site could be titled as: Walter Hang and Fall Creek vs. The City of Ithaca, Cornell University, and The New York Department of Environmental Conservation.

Walter Hang, the President of Toxics Targeting is calling for the immediate clean up of the lead contaminated site adjacent to the abandoned shotgun factory, Ithaca Gun, in Ithaca NY. The area, which is slated to become a park, is just over a 10 acre piece of land that is located just below the former Gun Factory at Fall Creek Gorge. The sight is strewn with what has been reported by the DEC as having over ten tons of discarded lead. In 1995 the DEC informed Cornell University, who owned the property at the time, of the high levels of lead at the site.

Alan Cohen, Mayor of Ithaca, confirmed that the city owns the property and it is their responsibility to clean up the land. The city purchased the land from Cornell at the end of February for one dollar. He states that "the city has known about the lead for at least a year and that the it poses no immediate danger to the public, you can pick it up and it will not harm you. It also does not disintegrate into dust, which we know is toxic in lead paint. We are concerned about this and are moving along to clean it up".

At a press conference at the site on Friday, July 28, Hang said that "lead is a highly toxic element that can cause permanent nervous system damage, learning impairment, and a wide range of acute and toxicity effects. Citizens visiting Ithaca Falls have never been warned that they are unknowingly picnicking, swimming and hiking in the area"

Hang was "tipped off" about two weeks ago to the Ithaca Falls site as a result of his companies research called The Southern Cayuga Lake Watershed Characterization Project, a survey which measures and monitors toxic chemicals found in the soil, water old dump sites and abandoned cars, and posts its findings on the Internet.

Though it is unclear who is responsible for the dumping of the lead Hang states that DEC tests reports the levels of lead reveal concentrations at the site up to 215,000 parts per million, well above the states maximum of 400 parts per million. The steep drops of the falls, and weather conditions such as rain lend to the contaminants' migration down the hill into the water where people swim and fish in the Fall Creek and Cayuga lake.

Tom Suozzo, an environmental engineer at the DEC's Kirkwood office told the Ithaca Journal that the "city already has approval money from the Brownfield program, which will reimburse up to 75% of the cities clean up costs of the site."

Hang is calling for immediate restriction of the contaminated area. He wants the DEC to declare the site as a Category One Inactive Hazardous Waste Disposal Site. Also, he is requesting a public meeting be held in Ithaca to inform citizens about the sites toxic risks. He wants to restrict public entry to the site's hazardous areas.

He is calling for a sixty day deadline for allowing responsible parties to agree to investigate and clean all areas impacted by the sites pollution.

According to Hang discussions of clean up of the site have lasted nearly five years. "Liability, he says, can fall on any of the sites former owners, which include Ithaca Gun, and Cornell University. Some of the bullet casings strewn on the area have the names of the manufacturers. They too may be liable."



WALTER HANG

JENNY WILLIS