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ARTICLE

To BOB Schinke	From PETE PETRONE
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Bacteria may clean waste site

► \$1.3 million
project proposed
for Oil City
location.

By Mark Weiner
Staff Writer

The owners of a toxic waste site in Syracuse's Oil City neighborhood are proposing a \$1.3 million cleanup that would use natural bacteria to destroy hazardous chemicals.

If approved, state officials say, it will be the first time biological treatment is used to clean a toxic site in Central New York.

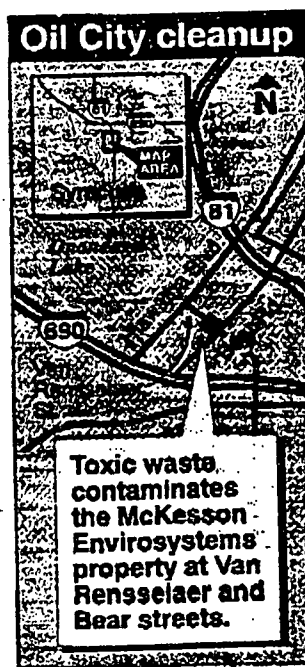
The bacteria could be set loose this summer on 8.2 acres at Van Rensselaer and Bear streets owned by McKesson EnviroSystems. The company will pay for the cleanup.

Engineers say it should take about 90 days for the bacteria to digest the chemical solvents. The bacteria breaks down the benzene ring found in oil and toxic waste and turns it into carbon dioxide, a harmless gas, and water.

The treatment has been increasingly successful, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation. It was used in 1990 to clean dirt contaminated from a jet fuel leak at Hancock Airport.

"Bio-remediation has been tried on these types of compounds in the past," said Robert Schick, chief of the DEC branch in Albany overseeing the cleanup. "In this case, they are taking bacteria that are natural to the site and exhibit the properties to break down the material."

McKesson hired Blasland & Bouck Engineers of Syracuse to test the effectiveness of the bacteria, and



Herald American

OK sought for Oil City bacterial treatment

■ OK SOUGHT

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the method showed great promise, Schick said. Their proposal is to grow the bacteria and then blend it into the toxic soil at the Oil City property.

"It's the first step to an eventual clean site," Schick added. "But by no means will the site be free and clean after this."

The land, which spans both sides of Van Rensselaer Street at Bear Street, was contaminated over decades. Ten storage tanks leaked and spilled petroleum and hazardous waste. The chemicals then seeped into the soil and contaminated ground water, state officials say.

McKesson EnviroSystems, a San Francisco-based company, agreed to begin the cleanup in 1988 when the storage tanks were dismantled. The company and its predecessors on the property had stored petroleum products and chemical waste for clients such as Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. of DeWitt.

The state has given the cleanup high priority because the property is within 150 feet of Syracuse's Inner Harbor redevelopment zone, and only a quarter-mile from Onondaga Lake.

Bacteria will be used in the first phase of the cleanup which will concentrate on the dry, upper layers of soil. Schick said they hope to prevent the contamination in the upper layers from spreading to the ground water.

Officials have not yet dealt with the problem of how to clean the contaminated water or saturated soils.

Until the cleanup begins, McKesson EnviroSystems must monitor the property to make sure the contaminated water does not spread.

"Contamination is pretty much right there on the site," Schick said. "But there will be continuing monitoring of the ground water."

He said tests show the chemicals have not reached the state Barge Canal, which is to be transformed to a public area with marinas and restaurants as part of the Inner Harbor development plan.

"It's one of the things we looked at very closely," Schick said.

During their investigation, engineers made 136 soil borings, took 159 soil samples and installed 22 wells to monitor ground water.

The biological treatment was selected over other, more expensive cleanup techniques.

It would have cost \$10.6 million to excavate the contaminated soil and burn it in an incinerator brought to the site, according to a state report.

Engineers estimated it would cost more than \$21 million to excavate the soil and dispose of it at a hazardous waste landfill.

Excavation and disposal at an off-site incinerator would cost \$23.6 million, the report said.

If successful, the biological treatment would hold promise for cleaning petroleum contamination found throughout Oil City's 800 acres.

In 1990, Syracuse officials proposed using bacteria to clean soil contaminated from petroleum spills and leaks at tank farms in Oil City. A \$50,000 test project was planned, but state environmental officials say they never received an indication the city wanted to proceed with the work.

Bio-remediation of petroleum was successful at Hancock Airport in 1990, where microbes were used to clean 3,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil on land where American Airlines once had a fuel storage tank.

When the oil or other chemical contamination is cleaned, the bacteria starve and die, preventing any unwanted side effects, scientists say.

A public meeting to discuss the proposal will be 7 p.m. Feb. 16 at the DEC office, 615 Erie Blvd. W., Syracuse. State officials will give a short presentation and then answer questions.

Written comments about the plan will be accepted until Feb. 26. Comments should be addressed to A. Joseph White, project manager, Department of Environmental Conservation, 50 Wolf Road, Room 222, Albany 12233.

Toxic waste site was once home to salt, oil companies

Here is a brief history of the toxic waste site at Van Rensselaer and Bear streets in Syracuse's Oil City neighborhood.

■ 1920s: Occupied by various salt companies.

■ 1928 to 1969: Petroleum storage facility for ARCO, using tanks dug through the south parcel.

■ 1951: A single large tank known as Tank 7 was installed on the north parcel.

■ 1969 to 1973: Petroleum storage facility for British Petroleum.

■ 1973: Inland Chemical Corp. purchases the property from BP. It uses the tanks for recycling chemical waste and storage. The chemicals handled include methanol, methyl ethyl chloride and other solvents.

■ 1982: Inland Chemical shuts operations.

■ 1986: McKesson EnviroSystems dismantles storage tanks and begins studies of contamination.

■ 1993: Engineers experiment with biological treatment of contaminated soil. They recommend using bacteria to clean up the 8.2-acre property.

Source: State Department of Environmental Conservation

FREE SPEECH

In a sense, the courts and the press both review each other's work. The court overrules the press' claims of First Amendment protection, and the press summarizes and critiques the court's decisions for the general public. The press and the judiciary must recognize their mutual interests in ensuring the preservation of a strong third branch of government.

Rose Elizabeth Bird, former California chief justice

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