



PCB cleanup planned at Special Metals property

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NEW HARTFORD — A 42-acre site in the center of New Hartford's business and industrial district is about to undergo a cleanup of hazardous chemicals.

The public is being invited to comment on the planned work on property surrounding Special Metals, the state Department of Environmental Conservation said.

The site at 4317 Middle Settlement Road has long been known to contain polychlorinated biphenyls, commonly known as PCBs. Only now, however, is the cleanup gearing up, the state said.

"There is no immediate threat to the environment or to human health," agency spokesman Steve Litwhiler said. "Otherwise, action would have been taken before now."

But at least one Middle Settlement Road resident said he does have concerns.

"My grandchildren play back there all the time," Paul Smith said, referring to Mud Creek, which runs past Special Metals before passing behind his home. "You do worry about it."

Utica College associate professor of biology Terri Provost pointed to studies that showed that exposure to even small amounts of PCBs could have developmental and physiological effects. PCBs are most notorious for being responsible for a ban on fishing in much of the Hudson River.

"This is a really controversial subject," Provost said. "There is research on both sides of the spectrum."

A spokeswoman from the state Health Department, which is partnering with the state on the Special Metals remediation, said area residents shouldn't be concerned.

"There are no known exposure concerns for people residing in the surrounding community that we are aware of," spokeswoman Claire Pospisil said.

No one from Special Metals returned phone calls from the O-D. When a reporter stopped by the site, she was told it was impossible to meet with anyone without a prior appointment.

The history

Special Metals has operated at the Middle Settlement Road location since 1958, a DEC fact sheet on the situation said.

An Observer-Dispatch story from 2000 said the DEC had identified the site as a source of PCB contamination in Sauquoit Creek, into which Mud Creek flows.

Under the current plan, the company would remove about 3,000 tons of soil containing the PCBs from land that was used in furnaces that once operated at the facility, the DEC said.

There are other affected areas on the Special Metals property that are not being addressed in this cleanup, DEC engineer Peter Taylor said.

Special Metals is footing the bill for the cleanup, Taylor said. He did not know how much it will cost, he said.

The company voluntarily entered a state brownfield program and has done investigations into the environmental condition of the property, Taylor said.

"Knowing what we know about the site, if Special Metals did not enter the brownfield program, the department would most likely have pursued some type of investigation and/or cleanup at the property," he said.

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