

Poughkeepsie Journal January 26, 2004

EPA to test air quality in 39 homes

HOPEWELL JUNCTION -- An Environmental Protection Agency mobile laboratory -- one of only two or three in the nation -- will visit the polluted area north of Hope-well Junction to test air quality in 39 homes starting today.

The "trace atmospheric gas analyzer," which looks like a recreational vehicle, will give the EPA real-time analysis of air samples from people's homes for about a week. More routine air testing techniques take 6-8 weeks to get laboratory results.

Chemicals in the groundwater have been detected in more than 100 wells, including 37 that exceeded federal health standards for trichloroethylene (TCE) and 13 that exceeded state health standards for trichloroethane (TCA).

Those chemicals readily turn to gas and can escape the ground and enter homes, potentially causing a health risk to those who breathe fumes.

"This is to put the issue to rest once and for all whether we have a vapor intrusion problem in the area," said Don Graham, the EPA's on-scene coordinator for the site. If the tests show significant levels of air pollution, more tests could be ordered, and EPA would act to limit exposure to unsafe air.

Trace detected

Tests in April and November at 25 homes revealed traces of TCE or TCA, but at levels not considered a health risk by the state Department of Health, EPA spokesman James Haklar said.

But the EPA has not developed health standards for chemicals in the air as it has done for water, so defining risk is difficult, Graham said. "That is our dilemma. Because we don't have a standard, we're going to evaluate this as we go," he said.

Considering the risk of polluted air at sites where water is polluted has only emerged in the last couple of years as a concern, Haklar and Graham said.

"We're very grateful that the EPA is doing this for us," said Debra Hall, who expects to have air in her Creamery Road home tested Monday.

IBM Corp. is installing ventilation systems in Endicott, Broome County, where TCE pollutes the groundwater, at any home with detectable levels of TCE in the air, according to the state Department of Health. The company has installed more than 300 ventilation systems there.

The EPA also is talking to IBM about testing air in homes at a polluted site in the Shenandoah area of East Fishkill, Haklar said. There, dozens of homes' well water is polluted with TCE and, to a greater extent, a related chemical -- tetrachloroethylene (PCE).

The 39 homes to be tested in the neighborhood north of Hopewell Junction were chosen because of past air quality tests, or because they may be susceptible to air pollution, Graham said. Among the homes to be tested are some that have no water pollution problems, but could have air pollution because of such factors as the depth of their wells or location of their basements.

Poughkeepsie Journal February 12, 2004

EPA: Some homes' air could be tainted

HOPEWELL JUNCTION -- Air could be contaminated with chemical vapors in nearly half the 36 homes tested by the Environmental Protection Agency in a neighborhood north of Hopewell Junction.

What that means to the health of those who live there is still unclear.

Laboratory confirmation of the preliminary results won't come before late March, EPA officials said. They wouldn't say how concentrated the trichloroethylene, or TCE, was in the air, according to the preliminary survey completed last week.

"Assuming that the lab data bears out the initial screening data, there would be additional homes investigated," Don Graham, the EPA's on-scene coordinator, said.

Chemicals found in wells

Chemicals in the groundwater have been detected in more than 100 wells, including 37 that exceeded federal health standards for TCE and 13 that exceeded state health standards for trichloroethane, or TCA. The first bad wells in the East Fishkill neighborhood were discovered in February 2003.

State and federal agencies installed filters to prevent people from drinking polluted water that exceeded state or federal health standards.

No such standards exist for contaminated air, however.

In the absence of a scientifically determined standard, the EPA, Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Health are discussing how to respond -- and deciding what concentrations of contaminated air require action, Graham said.

In other New York neighborhoods, in Hillcrest and Endicott, Broome County, homes have been outfitted with ventilation systems because TCE vapors from polluted groundwater were entering homes.

Debra Hall, a resident whose air was tested, said the preliminary results showed concentrations higher than those in the Broome County neighborhoods. She said she is content to wait for the results before she finds out if her home will receive a ventilation system or other remedy.

"Everybody is going to have to wait, and I'm going to have to wait with everybody," she said. "It's just a month and a half more."

Regional EPA officials have asked the site be named to the National Priority List, to become a Superfund site, qualifying it for additional EPA response time and money. Local, state and federal elected officials have urged the EPA in Washington to act on that request.

Source under investigation

The EPA is investigating the pollution's source, and is currently reviewing results of a groundwater study, Graham said. It has also requested information from businesses on Ryan Drive as part of the investigation, he said.

Groundwater in Shenandoah, another East Fishkill neighborhood, is polluted with TCE and -- to a greater extent -- a related chemical tetrachloroethylene, or PCE. It has already been named a Superfund site, and the EPA has said it plans to test air in homes there, too.

The New York Times March 15, 2004

In an I.B.M. Village, Pollution Fears Taint Relations With Neighbors

ENDICOTT, N.Y.-This village, best known as the birthplace of I.B.M., has an unusual look these days. Venting systems, with white plastic tubing that runs from basements to roofs, sprout from 377 houses and businesses.

Many houses are for sale, but there are few buyers.

"This area is taboo now," said Tim Davis, who lives on Monroe Avenue. "And it's going to stay that way."

Mr. Davis lives in what residents call "the plume" -- 320 acres encompassing the downtown and stretching across the village, all of which were polluted by industrial toxic substances. The chemicals contaminated soil and leached into groundwater. And they continue to produce vapors that waft into hundreds of basements.

Occurring over decades, the pollution is traceable at least in part to I.B.M., which used common solvents in its circuit board assembly.

The venting systems were all paid for by I.B.M., which two decades ago employed 12,000 workers in Endicott, just west of Binghamton. Now 1,700 collect I.B.M. paychecks here. Still,

residents say they feel trapped in virtually unsalable homes, where they fear the prolonged effects of the vapors on the health of their families.

"Your house acts as a kind of chimney" for the vapors, which have tested positive for the contaminant trichloroethene, or TCE, said Alan Turnbull, 69, who in 2002 created the Residents Action Group of Endicott, also known as R.A.G.E., after his wife, Donna Turnbull, 57, was found to have throat cancer. Ms. Turnbull does not smoke, and she used to exercise regularly in her finished basement. Now, she rarely ventures down the basement stairs.

That the TCE found in Endicott, a suspected carcinogen, has been measured at very low levels is scant comfort to those worried about more than two decades of exposure. "Oh, sure, we're scared to death," said Ms. Turnbull, who has lived in her Cleveland Avenue home for 21 years. "We know the chemicals are dangerous, but we don't know how dangerous or the long-term effects."

Results of air quality tests from homes in 2002 prompted the state environmental officials to announce in January that the Endicott pollution was more serious than previously believed.

The State Department of Environmental Conservation said it would upgrade Endicott's status from Class 4 -- meaning that the pollution source is no longer a problem, but is still being monitored -- to Class 2 -- a significant threat to the environment or health. The reclassification, backed by United States Representative Maurice Hinchey, a Democrat who represents the area, was a victory for citizen groups.

Despite the change, state health officials cannot say whether air or water pollution in Endicott has actually caused any health problems.

Village officials say tests show that the water is safe to drink.

And the venting systems are effective, according to Michael Fraser, a spokesman for the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Still, many residents remain pessimistic.

"This is going to become a dead town, no doubt about it," said Matt Latessa, 62, who owns a house in the plume and a men's hair salon on Monroe Avenue. Aging business owners such as Mr. Latessa, who wants to move to Florida, and families that bought starter homes in the plume feel trapped.

"We're being held hostage," he said.

Along with for-sale signs on front lawns, the venting systems, which emit a humming sound, have become a fact of life. Mr. Davis's house on Monroe Avenue, in the heart of the plume, is one of those that is vented.

"If you noticed, there's a Remax sign in front of my home," said Mr. Davis, who is troubled by persistent eye irritation. "I put it there instantly" after learning of the vapor problem, he said, but he added that he has had no offers for the house.

Mr. Fraser said vapor intrusion was one of the factors that made the Endicott situation unique.

"In past years, the guidance provided to regulatory agencies indicated that established cleanup levels were also protective for indoor air," Mr. Fraser said. "Advances in science and technology have recently shown that vapor intrusion concerns can accompany TCE-contaminated groundwater at very low levels."

For more than two decades, I.B.M. used liquid cleaning agents in its circuit board assembly operation. A half-dozen spills and leaks, including a documented 1979 leak of 4,100 gallons from an underground tank, left behind volatile organic compounds in the town's soil and aquifer. Trace elements of volatile organic compounds have been found in the city's drinking water, but the levels are within regulatory limits.

To date, I.B.M.'s former campus has been identified by the Department of Environmental Conservation as the major source of pollution, Mr. Fraser said. However, the state agency has also traced some contaminants to a local dry cleaner and is seeking out other polluters.

Since 1980, I.B.M. has pumped out 78,000 gallons of chemicals, including trichloroethane, trichloroethene, Freon, benzene and perchloroethene. The village is now dotted with 342 wells, paid for by I.B.M., that monitor or extract groundwater.

I.B.M. has already spent "tens of millions" and has pledged to work with the village, said a company spokesman, Todd Martin.

"We are going to proceed through this project as a partner with the community and other stakeholders," Mr. Martin said.

Before I.B.M. installed the venting systems early last year, "we met one on one with residents at their kitchen tables. We want to connect with people," said Mr. Martin.

Opinion is divided on whether I.B.M., which sold all its Endicott real estate but leases land for its operations there, remains a good neighbor or has become a disengaged corporate parent. Endicott never served as I.B.M. headquarters, but is called the company birthplace because that is the site of the first plant.

"There are two I.B.M.'s," Mr. Turnbull said. "In their early days, their philosophy was to take the best care of their employees." By the 80's, he said, "a new I.B.M. came forward. That's the one that cares about the bottom line."

The village's mayor maintains that working with I.B.M. is the best way forward.

"I say, thank God I.B.M. is here to take care of this mess, " Mayor Joan Hickey Pulse said. Residents should not lose sight of the fact that spills and leaks were accidental, she said. "I feel I.B.M. will spend any amount of money to clean this up."

The mayor also rejects the notion that Endicott is on the ropes. "We're not going to put up gates and say Endicott is closed," she said. "Endicott is not going to go away."

Citizens continue to pack monthly forums held by the Department of Environmental Conservation and the State Department of Health. Among other things, the community has reached an agreement with the State Department of Health and the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to conduct a study profiling the health of villagers and looking at cancer cases and other illnesses.

Cancer comprises a complex range of diseases with varying triggers, including old age. Connecting individual cases to environmental exposure is problematic, a fact acknowledged by Bernadette Patrick, who helped organize Citizens Acting to Restore Endicott's Environment.

Ms. Patrick said she has never been "a save-the-planet kind of person." But that changed after her daughter, Nicole Brinsko, was found to have Hodgkin's lymphoma at 17, which announced itself with a large swelling on her neck.

"My daughter was conceived, born and raised in the plume on Tracy Street," Ms. Patrick said.

She began to ask questions after she contacted another mother whose teenage daughter also grew up on Tracy Street and who developed bone cancer. Nicole is now in college and is growing a head of baby-fine black hair.

"Having cancer when you are 17 and wearing a wig to the senior prom is not normal," she said. "The whole situation isn't normal."

Another Tracy Street resident, Patrick Campbell, 38, has testicular cancer and is H.I.V. positive. He blames the village air and drinking water for his fragile health.

"I'll be lucky to make it to 40," he said. He said other families on Tracy Street have packed up and left. "I call it Emptycott," Mr. Campbell said.

Today I.B.M.'s once impressive campus has a deserted look. But people have not forgotten the good old days.

"In the 60's and 70's, I.B.M. took care of the area," said Edward Blaine, a Deacon at St. Ambrose Catholic Church in downtown Endicott and a member of R.A.G.E. "We had things other communities didn't have: weekly concerts, the carousel and the golf course. We went from being a great place to raise a family to where we are today. Now that choice has a dark side to it."

Poughkeepsie Journal April 13, 2004

EPA checks air in homes

Federal environmental officials are investigating whether vapors from polluted groundwater in two East Fishkill neighborhoods are entering homes and posing a health risk.

The costly tests are at the vanguard of a nationwide effort to understand and deal with contaminated air where groundwater has been polluted. There are likely hundreds, maybe thousands of such sites -- including several in the mid-Hudson Valley, where some residents are beginning to question whether they also need their air tested.

"I would like them to test more areas now that they're going around -- to find out if this business that's getting into the air is a problem," Joseph Cavaliere Sr. said

The wells that serve his Hopewell Junction neighborhood -- about 185 people, according to the EPA -- are contaminated with trichloroethylene, or TCE, but at low levels considered safe under state and federal health standards.

But what about the air? Cavaliere wonders. His home is within a few hundred feet of the well, so it's reasonable to expect the same groundwater flows under his home.

Several suspected sites

In Poughquag, a toxic chemical solvent spilled at the town highway garage polluted the drinking water for several homes in the hamlet. John Conrad, the engineer who has studied the site, said a public water system would not prevent air contamination.

Piped-in water won't protect people from vapors if they are drifting up from polluted groundwater in the Haviland area of Hyde Park, where Michael Giancarlo said he is concerned about his family.

Janet Mills wonders if her filter was enough in Staatsburg to protect her health from the chemicals in her groundwater.

At least 28 sites in Dutchess County have groundwater that has been polluted with volatile organic chemicals such as TCE, tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and trichloroethane (TCA), according to EPA and state Department of Environmental Conservation records. Most of these sites did not affect residential homes, and some happened so many years ago the concentrations of pollutants have diminished.

All homes affected by pollution that exceeded health standards were given bottled water, filters or public water.

For years, that seemed like enough to residents.

It isn't the polluted water itself that worries them, but the polluted vapors the water produces.

About 15 ventilation systems are to be installed in May, based on the first rounds of testing in one East Fishkill neighborhood north of Hopewell Junction -- with more likely as testing continues. The groundwater there is polluted with both TCE and TCA. Dozens of homes have filters to prevent residents from drinking tainted water.

Tests are also planned in the Shenandoah neighborhood, where PCE and TCE are in the groundwater. There, too, residents have filters and are waiting for a piping system.

Danger is realized

Environmental agencies have learned that vapors from volatile organic chemicals like these can seep through soil and gather in homes, posing a potential health risk perhaps on par with drinking tainted water. Exposure to volatile organic chemicals found in these homes have been linked to a variety of diseases, including cancer and birth problems.

"I never thought about the air because it was something that was never brought up in the public information sessions," Mills said, referring to sessions the DEC held through the 1990s as pollution in her neighborhood was addressed.

She said she's been very satisfied with the DEC's response to her problem. For the last couple of years, ongoing tests of her well have shown no pollution. Mills hopes that means there's no reason to worry about tainted air in her home. But, she said, to know for sure, "they would have to do tests."

John Conrad, owner of Conrad Geoscience Corp. in Poughkeepsie, has been investigating and monitoring the pollution in Poughquag for years for the Town of Beekman. He's curious to see what the EPA finds in East Fishkill, because it may predict concerns in Poughquag and elsewhere.

"I don't think you can dismiss it in Poughquag as an issue," he said.

The geology and manner of house construction are as likely to predict which homes have air contamination as is the concentration of polluted water in their wells, Conrad said.

The situation is similar to radon, a radioactive gas that is the nation's second-leading cause of lung cancer. In the neighborhood north of Hopewell Junction in East Fishkill, some homes that did not have contaminated wells had contaminated air, the EPA found.

And volatile organic chemicals are common at hazardous waste sites. TCE has been found at more than 850 federal Superfund sites nationwide, PCE at more than 770 and TCA at more than 690, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. The EPA has roughly 1,200 sites on its Superfund list.

"The chlorinated solvents, on a national level, were responsible for so many of these hazardous waste sites because they are used in so many products, and they were so effective," Conrad said. "And their problem is they really don't break down."

Some common household chemicals, like cleaners, paints and solvents, can produce the same levels of contamination in indoor air.

Hyde Park tests clean

Tests of indoor air at five homes in the Greenbush area of Hyde Park in 2001 did not show contamination associated with groundwater polluted with the gasoline additive methyl tertiary-butyl ether, MTBE, DEC spokeswoman Maureen Wren said. MTBE detected in the air was associated with such things as lawn mowers, she said.

The science of studying "vapor intrusion" is so young that neither the state nor federal governments have set health standards for contaminated air, as they have for contaminated water.

"As appropriate, and as we can, we're going to go out and start testing at those sites where we think it makes sense, where the potential is," EPA spokeswoman Mary Mears said.

"It's obviously an emerging problem nationwide that we didn't know much about until recently," Mears said. "We're doing what we can to try to address it."

She acknowledged the cost of testing and especially treating homes with bad air can be steep.

"Of course cost is always a concern because cost is a concern in the real world, but our first concern is: Are people being affected by vapor intrusion?" Mears said.

Broome County site exposed

New York, which is responsible for cleanups at more of the smaller sites in the mid-Hudson region, has also dealt with vapor intrusion recently -- most notably at two sites in Broome County, where groundwater is polluted with some of the same chemical solvents as neighborhoods here.

The state set working standards for air contamination to dictate which homes should have ventilation systems. But both federal and state agencies say it will be months, if not years, before there are national health standards for even the most common of these air contaminants.

New York's departments of environmental conservation and health are also reviewing hazardous waste sites to determine which should be tested for potential indoor air problems, DEC spokeswoman Wren said. Among their considerations in deciding which sites will be tested are the type and magnitude of contaminants, type of soil, depth to groundwater and potential pathways or barriers for the vapors to reach homes.

The costs can vary, but testing often costs \$1,000, and ventilation systems can cost between \$1,500 to \$5,000, Wren said. Where those responsible for the spills are unable or unwilling to pay, the state will cover the costs.

Cavaliere, like others, is waiting for an EPA study due in 2005 that could set new standards for acceptable exposures to TCE. He said for now, he can only wonder at how the traces of chemicals -- in the water, and/or the air -- might be affecting his health, his children's health and the health of his grandchildren.

"You're not going to get rid of it, and you're not going to be able to blame. People used this stuff all over the place," he said. "We've got it bad, so let's try to work at it."

Poughkeepsie Journal May 19, 2004

EPA to test 14 homes in Shenandoah

SHENANDOAH -- A mobile laboratory called a trace atmospheric gas analyzer will visit 14 houses in the Shenandoah area of East Fishkill today and Thursday to determine if air under the homes is unhealthy.

The air under several buildings is contaminated with vapors seeping up from polluted groundwater, Environmental Protection Agency spokesman James Haklar said this week.

The EPA decided the contamination under those 14 buildings was high enough to warrant testing indoors, Haklar said. Contamination at lower concentrations was found under other homes. The EPA did not use a specific concentration as a threshold to determine which homes would receive further tests.

The EPA tested the air under more than 30 buildings last month, and is considering testing more.

Some residents are miffed, however, that the EPA has waited so long to test the air -- especially since testing began earlier at the Hopewell Precision site, another polluted site in East Fishkill, discovered nearly three years after the Shenandoah area pollution.

Unlike that site, the EPA has not disclosed clear standards it is using to determine which homes are to be tested in Shenandoah, and what concentrations of chemicals are deemed safe.

"Obviously, we're hoping that everything is going to be good," said Phil Velie, whose home is one of the 14 scheduled for further tests. "The levels we like to go by is zero."

An IBM Corp. contractor, Jack Manne Inc., allegedly dumped tetrachloroethylene, a chemical used to cleanse microchip racks in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Now, groundwater is polluted with PCE and the chemical it breaks down into, TCE. The contamination was discovered in 2000.

A government health assessment found people who drank tainted water from Shenandoah for many years may face a greater risk of cancer.

The impact of breathing polluted vapors was not explicitly considered in that study.

State and federal environmental agencies are only beginning to grapple with the problem of vapor intrusion at polluted sites.

However, the EPA lacks federal standards for air quality like those for water quality.

The Hopewell Precision investigation has used interim New York guidelines for TCE air contamination. There are no such guidelines for PCE.

"We looked at what the levels were and said, 'Well, yes, this seems high enough that it would warrant further investigation,' " Haklar said when asked how the EPA chose which homes to investigate further.

Press & Sun-Bulletin May 20, 2004

TCE vapor found in 3 homes in Hillcrest;Extent of pollution unknown, state says

HILLCREST -- Vapor intrusion -- the type of pollution causing problems in Endicott -- is affecting homes in Hillcrest, although more tests are needed to find the extent of the problem, according to a report from the state Department of Health.

At least three Hillcrest homes will require ventilation systems to remove traces of trichloroethylene, an industrial solvent used by nearby industries. Sampling in March by the state Department of Environmental Conservation also found traces of the chemical, known as TCE, in outdoor air samples, according to the report obtained Wednesday by the Press & Sun-Bulletin.

The state will test more houses and commercial properties to determine the extent and boundaries of pollution, the report stated.

"This seems to be elusive," said Broome County Executive Jeffrey P. Kraham, a Hillcrest resident. "It's not as extensive as Endicott, but it doesn't seem to be as predictable."

The state briefed Kraham on the test results Wednesday.

Testing in Hillcrest was prompted by discoveries last year in Endicott, where scientists found chemicals thought to be trapped in the ground were actually forming gases and entering buildings, a process known as vapor intrusion.

In Endicott, IBM Corp. is installing ventilation systems on about 480 properties to prevent vapors from entering.

The affected properties are in a 300-acre plume of chemicals coming from the former IBM plant on North Street.

In Hillcrest, researchers took samples from 28 houses in March, after a preliminary study found TCE gases in the soil.

The tests detected TCE in 13 of 28 indoor air samples, ranging from 0.86 to 26 micrograms per cubic meter of air, according to the report.

Based on those results, health officials have determined that ventilation systems will be needed in three of the homes, and more tests will be taken in other houses.

The Hillcrest project is being paid for by state Superfund money, although no figures were available as of Wednesday.

Previous measures to clean pollution in the neighborhood included excavation of 10,500 tons of soil laced with heavy metals and 500 tons of sludge at the former CAE Electronics plant on Nowlan Road, in the center of the community. That cost between \$1 million and \$2 million, and was paid for by CAE.

State scientists will evaluate the former CAE site and the former Triple Cities Metal Finishing site, also on Nowlan Road, as possible sources of the TCE pollution, according to the report.

They also will consider other possible sources.

The state Superfund is tapped for sites that pose a significant threat and where other resources, including parties responsible for the pollution, are not immediately known or available. The state then seeks reimbursement for funds after it has linked the problem to a source.

The Hillcrest tests for vapor intrusion are part of a broader environmental evaluation of the neighborhood that began after six children suddenly developed cancer, most of them in the late 1990s.

Those children include Sean Shumaker, who lives on Fenton Avenue. Tests at the Shumaker home did not show significant levels of TCE, said Beth Shumaker, Sean's mother.

She said she is "relieved," but also eager to learn more about other pollution in the neighborhood, including traces of heavy metals associated with cancer that were found in sediments of a nearby pond.

The study that documented the pond pollution -- overseen by Binghamton University geology professor Joseph Graney -- indicates that heavy metals, including cadmium and chromium, came from air pollution.

Cadmium, chromium and TCE are each linked to cancer in people exposed to enough of them, including low amounts over extended periods.

The state Department of Health has determined the childhood cancers in Hillcrest are not likely a matter of chance.

The agency is still trying to determine a cause and expects to release a report on environmental factors in the fall, according to spokeswoman Claire Pospisil.

Press & Sun-Bulletin June 7, 2004

Vapor intrusion in Broome has cost state \$400,000 so far; Superfund sites unique in state

So far, understanding Broome County's unique pollution problem has cost the state more than \$400,000 - and that is just the beginning.

Investigations in Hillcrest and Endicott, where underground plumes of industrial solvents have been found entering homes through a process called vapor intrusion, require extensive and sophisticated sampling of air inside and outside homes and air trapped in the ground.

In Endicott, IBM Corp. is paying for much of the work in an area encompassing about 300 acres south of its former North Street plant, where approximately 480 homes or businesses are affected.

But the state Department of Environmental Conservation has had to tap the Superfund -- a state fund to clean pollution -- to proceed with work west of the IBM plume and in Hillcrest. Both are areas where those responsible for the pollution have not yet been identified.

The DEC is also conducting more extensive tests beneath Creative Printing on East Main Street, Endicott, where solvents have been found underground.

The state will seek compensation from responsible parties as it documents the extent and source of the pollution, said Mary Jane Peachey, a regional engineer with the state DEC.

Tests to determine if chemicals are passing from the ground into basements requires a series of tests that collectively cost about \$2,500 per home, Peachey said. In Hillcrest, tests have been taken in 28 homes, and dozens more are slated through the year.

In addition, scientists are inserting dozens of sophisticated probes and wells into the soil to track the subterranean flow of chemicals. Sometimes homes require special systems, similar to radon systems, to vent gases from beneath their basements. Each of these costs about \$2,500, according to Thomas Suozzo, an engineer with the DEC. In Hillcrest, three have been installed so far.

The capital costs in Hillcrest and Endicott so far total about \$220,000. Staffing the project with engineers and managers costs at least as much as the equipment and sampling, Peachey said. For example, a recent series of meetings in Hillcrest included at least six scientists from the state

Department of Health and the DEC; some traveled from Albany. Suozzo, who works out of Kirkwood, said the Hillcrest project is taking about 90 percent of his time.

The projects in Hillcrest and Endicott are in the beginning phase. It may take a year or more before they are completed.

The state is also considering work at other sites in Union and Vestal, including:

- * A three-acre site called Former Bright Outdoors, at 631 Field St., Johnson City, which was recently added to the state's hazardous-waste registry.

- * A neighborhood surrounding a former Canada Dry bottling plant on Badger Avenue in Endicott.

- * A neighborhood near the west end of Old Vestal Road, which is near a federal Superfund site.

There is a valuable return on the investment, in addition to a cleaner environment, Peachey said. These are the first Superfund sites dealing with vapor intrusion in the state, she said, and scientists are learning a lot in short order about a problem first discovered in Endicott last year.

"It's important," Peachey said. "This is a big site in its uniqueness. Given the history and geology, its a very appropriate place to begin."

The Press Enterprise June 12, 2004

WYLE TESTS CONFIRM FEARS;

Norco: The State Finds A Suspected Cancer-causing Chemical Under A Street Near The Laboratory.

State officials have confirmed what neighbors of Wyle Labs in Norco have long suspected: Underground contamination from the hazardous-testing facility has seeped into their neighborhood, posing long-term health threats.

The findings reinforce the suspicions of dozens of Wyle's neighbors who have long blamed the company's pollution for their battles with cancer and thyroid disorders.

The discovery of more contamination has prompted government officials to order another round of testing in the neighborhood. State and city officials have called a town hall meeting Monday to explain the findings and answer residents' questions.

Tests overseen last month by the state Department of Toxic Substances Control showed that a suspected cancer-causing chemical is trapped in soil below sections of Golden West Lane just north of Wyle, a 47-year-old military and industrial testing facility.

State officials say the chemical, a solvent, does not pose an immediate health risk or justify evacuation.

Less than a year ago, Wyle and state water board officials insisted contamination could not have traveled north into that neighborhood.

Drexel Smith, Wyle's senior vice president and general manager, declined to comment on the contamination along Golden West. He said the company agreed to let the state toxic substances department do the talking.

TCE LEVELS

Department officials said they don't know how far the pollution has traveled or what health risks might have existed in the past.

However, anyone exposed to the pollution over decades faces a higher risk of liver or kidney cancer as well as respiratory and central nervous system disorders, said Dr. Deborah Oudiz, a toxicologist with the department.

The solvent, trichloroethylene, or TCE, was found at depths of five and 12 feet in the middle of Golden West Lane.

At three of 10 test sites on Golden West, TCE levels were up to three times the limit that sets off warning flags for regulators. And two of those readings exceeded levels that could lead to long-term health risks. An 11th site, on the Wyle property within yards of two Golden West homes, had the highest level.

State officials will be in the neighborhood today to survey eight Golden West homes in preparation for tests that will look for contamination below houses. If hazardous vapors are there, they could be leaking into people's homes, Oudiz said.

The TCE in soil beneath Golden West likely is caused by the evaporation of contaminated groundwater, state officials said. Buildings on top of contaminated soil or water can trap hazardous vapors indoors.

"They would have to be living directly on top of it to be at risk," said Ron Baker, a toxic substances control department spokesman. "We are doing our best to find out what is going on on their properties and whether they are being exposed to any pollution." LITTLE OVERSIGHT UNTIL '90S

Wyle has been operating since 1957 but had little government oversight until the late 1990s. Groundwater monitoring did not begin until 1999. Since then, hazardous chemicals including solvents and rocket fuels have been detected in Wyle test wells and septic systems.

Several former Wyle employees have said that hazardous chemicals often were mishandled at the site. Ed Vargas, who worked at Wyle in the early 1990s, said he twice went to his supervisor

with concerns about TCE being spilled on the ground and leaking out of large drums. His complaints, he said, were not taken seriously.

Sean Sakch, who worked at Wyle in 1987, said he and his co-workers often spilled TCE down drains.

Wyle officials repeatedly have declined to comment on any statements made by former employees.

Some residents in the Golden West area said they have lost faith that the government will protect them from the pollution. "For sale" signs dot the neighborhoods around Wyle.

"(State officials) keep telling me, 'It's no big deal. It's not an immediate health threat,' and I just want to yell at them, 'That's great for you to say, but you're not living in it,'" said Pat Dubiel, who lives near the two highest contamination levels found last month. "And I don't understand what they mean when they say, 'Don't worry, it's only a long-term threat.' What does that mean for me? I've been here since 1986."

Like dozens of past and current Wyle neighbors, Dubiel lost her thyroid to a life-threatening disorder, and she wonders if Wyle is to blame. She also has had sinus surgery and severe respiratory problems, prompting her doctors to ask her in the early 1990s if she had been exposed to hazardous chemicals, she said.

"At the time, I thought, 'Heavens no,'" she said. "I never dreamed it could be in my own back yard."

Tired of worrying about hazardous waste in her home, Dubiel recently put her house up for sale, then took it off the market. "I just couldn't, in good conscience, sell it to someone and not let them know exactly what they are getting into," she said.

Wyle's neighbors may never get the answers they are looking for, Oudiz said. "It's very hard to get a handle on what happened in the past."

The pollution has led nearby residents to file a spate of lawsuits, including two class-action suits that encompass, among others, hundreds of people who bought new homes in the area but allegedly were not told about Wyle's activities.

In 2002, Wyle sold its property to a housing developer who wants to build 372 luxury homes.

That plan is still in the works, but cleanup is expected to continue into 2006.

The Indianapolis Star June 20, 2004

***Toxin to cost Martinsville millions;
Solvent taints aquifer in once-renowned spa town***

MARTINSVILLE, Ind. -- The vintage neon sign atop a historic downtown building is a reminder of this city's legacy: "Martinsville, City of Mineral Water."

For more than a century, people flocked to local spas and sanitariums to soak up the water's reputed healing powers.

Now, the aquifer that supplies the city's drinking water is poisoned by a toxic chemical -- the legacy of an industrial dry cleaner that closed 13 years ago. The suspected cancer-causing solvent has soaked 40 feet into the ground and moved more than a mile to the city's wells.

State and federal officials have known for years that the former Masterwear Corp. probably contaminated soil behind its plant with perchloroethylene, or PCE, a powerful solvent blamed for contaminating dry-cleaning sites throughout the United States.

But nobody tried to determine the extent of contamination -- until December 2002, when the toxin reached two of the city's three drinking-water wells. One well was so polluted that it was immediately shut down. City officials say the water is safe for now, but the long-term solution is drilling new wells.

Now, this city of 12,000 about 35 miles southwest of Indianapolis faces a mess so large it will take years -- and millions of dollars -- to clean up. City water customers may see monthly bills triple to help fund a new water system.

Next month, ventilation equipment likely will be installed in several downtown buildings to clear them of harmful chemical vapors, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

And the long process of cleaning up contaminated soil beneath the former Masterwear parking lot downtown will begin.

The cleanup, though, comes years after people began complaining about contamination. Years after the dry cleaner left town. And years after former Indiana Attorney General Pamela Carter says she tried to sound the alarm about pollution.

Carter, who left office in 1997, said she held news conferences about the threat of pollution in Martinsville and Indianapolis after an environmental consultant found contamination near dry-cleaning businesses owned by James A. Reed and his wife, Linda Lou Davis Reed.

"I made sure this wasn't a secret," Carter said. "I was screaming; I was a voice in the wilderness. I cannot tell you how many contacts we made at every level."

But she said her warning received little attention.

"I was really surprised there was no cleanup," she said. "It is absolutely distressing that it took so long."

Early pollution concerns

James Reed set up shop in Martinsville in January 1986 after a cleaning business he co-owned in Mooresville folded. His Masterwear plant in Martinsville was tucked in an alley behind one of the historic Main Street storefronts west of the county courthouse square.

The city's troubles soon began.

The Morgan County Health Department received complaints about odors from the business; Masterwear used PCE to clean oil from gloves and towels used by industries. City fire officials worried about barrels stored in the gravel and dirt lot behind the building and in the nearby alley.

Still, it's unclear how all the PCE got into the ground.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management first inspected Masterwear in 1987 after receiving a complaint about odors and metal drums piled behind the building, agency records show. Investigators determined Masterwear was complying with federal waste-handling regulations.

The agency received two more complaints in 1990 but didn't investigate, records show.

A turning point came in August 1991, when a tank overflowed, sending what city officials said was a stream of about 300 gallons of waste oil -- which often was contaminated with PCE -- down the street toward the storm sewer. Reed said it was less than 50 gallons. After the spill, the state environmental agency reviewed Masterwear files but decided no action was necessary.

A month later, the city's wastewater treatment plant reported problems treating sewage because of suspected chemical pollution. Tests found elevated levels of PCE, which state officials said likely came from Masterwear.

When state inspectors finally checked the Masterwear site, they found dozens of 55-gallon drums of contaminated oils and other chemicals stacked on bare ground behind the building. More than 85 drums were inside the building. Soil behind the business was discolored from suspected chemical contamination.

Reed said there were so many barrels "because that is how we were supposed to store and transport the gloves" and industrial rags sent to Masterwear for cleaning.

But by fall 1991, Masterwear was packing to move to Indianapolis. That's when employees said they discovered some of the drums had rusted and leaked.

Although records show environmental officials suspected soil contamination, neither the state nor the EPA tested the soil to determine how bad the pollution was.

"There were things we saw during inspections in the early 1990s, but nothing to suggest the magnitude of the problem that now identifies itself out there," said Bruce Palin, deputy assistant commissioner of the state environmental agency's office of land quality.

In 1996, some of Reed's employees gave sworn statements that the 55-gallon drums, some containing PCE, rusted and leaked their contents onto the ground. Former employees also said in sworn statements that waste was dumped into the sewer system at Reed's Indianapolis locations.

A now-plugged pipe sticking out of the ground outside the Martinsville site "will be taken out for investigative purposes," said Ken Theisen, the EPA official overseeing the site. Reed said he believed the pipe was a place to access the sewer to remove clogs; Martinsville businessman William Cure, who rented the building to Reed, said it was a well once used for geothermal heating.

Reed, who lives in Camby in southwest Marion County, denies any wrongdoing.

"We don't know what might have happened when we weren't there," said Reed, who, along with his wife, left the dry-cleaning business after a 1996 lawsuit filed by Carter citing a pattern of environmental violations in Indianapolis and Martinsville. Reed now drives a truck.

"The attorney general went on television back then and said I was the worst corporate criminal since Jack the Ripper," he said. "I was accused of running sloppy plants. But they never proved a thing."

Dangerous vapors

For years, Bill Cunningham was one of Martinsville's biggest cheerleaders.

But the former Chamber of Commerce director and his wife, Mary Ann, moved out of the city in February and are trying to sell the 100-year-old building where they had run a photography studio since 1986 and lived for the past 12 years.

They rarely go back.

They say they get sick every time they're in the building and suspect their severe headaches and respiratory and sinus problems were caused or exacerbated by years of breathing PCE vapors.

Short-term exposure to vapors can cause dizziness, fatigue, headaches and lack of coordination; inhaling or ingesting it over long periods can cause liver or kidney damage and is suspected of causing cancer, according to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

While the Cunninghams are angry that they were forced to move, they're angrier that they weren't warned of the dangers years ago.

When the state tested for vapors near Masterwear last summer, the Cunninghams' building had the highest levels -- almost 17 times the level the state environmental agency considers a health risk from short-term exposure. But samples taken at their building in 1996 as part of the attorney general's investigation -- five years after Reed left town -- found vapors 60 times the risk level.

State environmental officials said they did not receive the attorney general's report in 1996 but can't say when they did. Little was known about the health dangers of vapors at the time, and nobody had determined a safe level, the EPA's Theisen said.

"Now we know that the vapors we breathe may be just as much of a problem," he said.

But the attorney general's consultant in 1996 suggested the vapors were significant because they could indicate a reservoir of underground pollution. Still, nobody tested the soil at the site until last year.

PCE levels as high as 270,000 parts per billion were found in soil beneath the now-paved parking lot, and levels in groundwater at the site were as high as 20,000 ppb. The state's drinking-water standard is 5 ppb; PCE was detected at more than twice that level in one of the town's wells during routine testing. That well was closed as soon as the pollution was detected.

Carter said she does not remember when she gave the state environmental agency the report, labeled "confidential," but had no reason to keep it from the agency.

Fixing the damage

Next month marks another turning point for Martinsville.

In buildings with vapor problems, equipment will draw vapors from beneath the structures and vent them outside.

Cleaning the heavily contaminated soil behind the Masterwear site will take much longer -- probably years, Theisen said.

Because pollution is so deep and close to building foundations, it cannot be excavated and hauled away. The likely alternative is extracting vapors from the soil and destroying them with a carbon-activated filter or by burning them, Theisen said.

"It is our intention to do whatever is right," said Reed, who, along with property owner Cure, will pay the estimated \$750,000 cost of cleaning vapors and soil. Both have insurance policies with coverage to help with the payment. Reed said, "I'm not moving to Florida or trying to leave this. I want to take care of it."

Residents of Martinsville, though, will pay millions for safe drinking water.

Mayor Shannon Buskirk said because pollution continues to seep toward city wells, the long-term solution is drilling new ones.

The well that was most contaminated has been shut down, possibly slowing the pollution's progression to the other two, city engineers said. For the past six months, the two remaining wells have shown no sign of PCE. But Buskirk worries they would not supply enough water in the event of a drought or large fire.

It will cost \$8 million to \$10 million or more to buy property, drill wells and pay for storage tanks, equipment, repairs and maintenance -- about \$5 million of which is attributed to the pollution. The city will sell bonds to finance the overhaul.

To repay them, though, monthly bills that now average about \$9 for a typical home could triple, the mayor said.

"This is a sad situation," Buskirk said, referring to Reed, "because we're the ones who are going to have to clean up his mess."

Press & Sun-Bulletin July 17, 2004

DEC readies for new tests in Hillcrest; Door-to-door data to be collected

HILLCREST -- State environmental officials will begin surveying the neighborhood Monday to prepare for another round of testing for chemical pollution in homes.

Officials from the state Department of Environmental Conservation will begin going door to door to collect information from homeowners, said Thomas Suozzo, a DEC engineer. They will be working in what the agency and the state Department of Health have designated as the "study area" -- about 320 acres with the approximate center near Saluda Street and Nowlan Road.

The survey, which will last several weeks, is part of a larger effort to understand the extent of pollution in the ground from chemicals called volatile organic compounds. Testing earlier this year showed vapors from the chemicals were passing from the ground into some basements through a process called vapor intrusion.

Initial tests showed traces of vapors in 13 of 28 homes, including three that were later fitted with ventilation systems.

Officials plan to test more homes, but first scientists must collect information through the survey to help them determine which homes to test, Suozzo said. That includes determining which homes have central air conditioning, stone foundations and radon systems. All of these factors can influence the underground movement of chemical vapors.

People with questions can call the state DEC at 775-2545, ext. 104, or the DOH at 800-458-1158, ext. 27870.

Trichloroethylene, or TCE, has been found in the ground at industrial sites once occupied by Triple Cities Metal Finishing and CAE Electronics, both on Nowlan Road. Triple Cities Metal Finishing is working with the DEC to design and build a system to vacuum the pollution from the ground, said Mary Jane Peachey, a DEC regional engineer.

TCE has been found to increase the risk of cancer in people exposed to enough of it. The Health Department documented an excess of childhood cancer in the neighborhood in the 1990s, but has not determined a cause.

The New York Times August 12, 2004

I.B.M. Agrees To Take Steps To Clean Up Contamination

ENDICOTT, N.Y.-I.B.M. has agreed to a consent order with the state that binds the company, founded in this upstate village, to a course of action to clean up an underground plume of industrial pollution, decades old, that has sent chemical vapors wafting into hundreds of basements.

The company, which was not the sole source of the pollution but is the only business working on the cleanup, has already spent several million dollars installing ventilation systems similar to those used for radon gas, and creating a network of wells, pumps and filters to extract chemical contaminants from groundwater. The vapor problem came to light here in 2003 as a result of air-quality tests sought by residents and required by the State Department of Environmental Conservation.

I.B.M. agreed to the consent order on Aug. 4 without admitting wrongdoing. "We are fully committed to this project," said Todd Martin, a spokesman for I.B.M., which has reduced its work force here to 1,700 from a peak of 12,000 in the mid-1970's through the 80's. The order states that the company disagrees with the department's assessment that the pollution poses "a significant threat to public health and the environment."

I.B.M. is installing a piping system that will transport water from extraction wells to a treatment facility on Monroe Street, Mr. Martin said. Earlier this year, the company donated \$2 million to the village for equipment to help treat its well water.

The 52-page consent order outlines specific steps I.B.M. must take in the next year. The company is required to file plans for additional work, with deadlines ranging from 45 days to a year. The requirements include devising a blueprint for identifying and eliminating underground pollution at what was a sprawling circuit-board factory on North Street.

Penalties and fines for failure to complete work on time range from \$500 to \$3,000 a day. The order also requires "additional investigation and remediation," said Commissioner Erin M. Crotty of the Department of Environmental Conservation.

The order also calls for interim steps to be taken. They include more aggressive pumping and treatment at areas of known contamination and the use of vacuum-assisted pumping for trapping vapors as well as contaminants in groundwater. The order also allows the state agency to step in and require immediate action if new and pressing problems are uncovered.

The plume is responsible for so-called vapor intrusion from contaminated soil beneath 480 properties, most of them homes and businesses, between the Susquehanna River and the former

I.B.M. campus. People who live there have wondered whether the pollution has played a role in assorted cancers and other illnesses over the years. The pollution resulted from a series of spills, some of which have been traced to the I.B.M. site.

Alan Turnbull, the executive director of the Resident Action Group of Endicott, which has tracked the pollution and argued for state intervention, welcomed the agreement. "This has been a long time coming, but thankfully it has arrived," said Mr. Turnbull, who helped organize the group after his wife, Donna, was found to have throat cancer.

Since 1980, I.B.M. has pumped out 78,000 gallons of chemicals. The village is now dotted with 342 wells, paid for by I.B.M., that monitor or extract groundwater.

Betty Havel's husband, Joseph, used to operate his taxidermy business in the basement of their home on Arthur Avenue. But now the basement is largely unused -- one of several hundred in the village center that are being vented to remove trace amounts of potentially harmful vapors seeping into homes from contaminated soil.

The ground contaminants are a byproduct of chemicals called volatile organic compounds that were used as degreasers by local industries, including I.B.M.

Before the state became involved, said Edward Blaine, whose home is being vented, "it seemed like I.B.M. was setting the timetable, the D.E.C. was monitoring it, but they weren't setting deadlines. Now that's changed." Mr. Blaine said subsequent tests of air quality in his home have shown a decrease in the contaminants, including trichloroethene and tetrachloroethene. The chemicals have been associated with health risks ranging from organ damage to cancer in people exposed to enough of them.

"All of us wish this had never happened to begin with," said Mayor Joan Pulse. "But the state has said to I.B.M. that you must do this. And I.B.M. is stepping up and saying, 'We will do it.'"

Many residents have been unable to sell their homes at prices they considered fair market value, Mrs. Havel said. "Some days I wake up and say, I want to get away from it all, just pack up the car and go."

Nonetheless, residents said the consent order represents a victory. "This is a testimony to the collective action on the part of local residents," said Donna Lupardo, a member of Resident Action Group of Endicott.

The Denver Post August 22, 2004

***State bulks up removal rules for toxic vapor Group:
TCE still a threat to kids Critics say health officials loosened proposed
cleanup levels after receiving input from industry lawyers.***

State health officials on Friday tightened regulations for removing harmful chemical vapors that leak into residential basements from industrial sites.

But environmental groups immediately criticized the new policy on trichloroethylene, or TCE, a common industrial solvent. They contend, and state officials acknowledge, that the policy is weaker than an earlier state draft and a proposed new federal standard.

The new policy, they said, fails to protect children living near contaminated sites.

"The most recent Environmental Protection Agency studies say children are especially vulnerable to TCE vapors," said Don Holmstrom, an environmental analyst with the Denver Area Labor Federation. "In those areas, the most protective cleanup standard should be used."

The federation is monitoring redevelopment of the Gates Rubber plant site in Denver.

The groups also say the state health department loosened proposed cleanup levels after receiving input from Gates and industry lawyers.

Not so, said Howard Roitman, the state health department's manager of environmental programs.

"That is a complete mischaracterization of what happened," he said. "We did have communication from people who said we think there's more information to consider. We then held public hearings and accepted public comment. The process was completely open."

TCE is a colorless, highly volatile liquid used mainly as an industrial cleaner in the automotive and metals industries. Breathing small amounts may cause headaches, lung irritation and dizziness.

TCE has been found in groundwater at other Denver- area sites, including the Lockheed Martin plant, Lowry Landfill Superfund site and the former Rocky Mountain Arsenal, and under some residential neighborhoods near the former Redfield Rifle Scope plant and Lowry Air Force Base.

In groundwater plumes, TCE has been shown to vaporize and migrate to the surface, where it can collect in residential basements at dangerous levels.

Last year, the state proposed requiring residential air cleanups when indoor vapor levels reached 0.016 parts per million. In the final version, cleanups are required at 1.6 ppm.

But Roitman noted that the new regulation toughens the cleanup action level of 13 ppm.

The New York Times September 3, 2004

I.B.M. Offers \$10,000 to Owners of Contaminated Houses

By ANTHONY DePALMA; Samme Chittum contributed reporting for this article.

The [I.B.M. Corporation](#) announced yesterday that it was willing to pay \$10,000 each to the owners of nearly 500 contaminated homes in the upstate village of Endicott if the owners give up their right to sue for property damages caused by industrial pollution.

Residents have complained that ventilation systems I.B.M. has installed in their homes since 2002 to prevent **toxic vapors** from building up in the basements have hurt property values. Last year they asked Attorney General Eliot Spitzer for help in protecting home values.

Mr. Spitzer's office negotiated with I.B.M. for a year to develop the payment program, which is modeled after a similar effort in Rochester. Endicott officials think the payments will help revive the village, compensate homeowners for lost real estate values and allow residents to improve their homes, creating spillover economic benefits. Homeowners would not be required to use the money for home improvements.

The owners of the 480 houses and a handful of commercial properties that were offered the ventilation systems are eligible to receive payments. Owners would give up the right to sue for property damages but would still be able to sue for personal injury.

The program could cost I.B.M. more than \$5 million, and will be another costly step in the company's efforts to remediate hazards it helped create in this upstate village just west of Binghamton, where it got its start nearly a century ago. Other manufacturers also contributed to the pollution, but only I.B.M. is helping clean it up.

Last month, I.B.M. agreed to a consent order with the state to clean up the remaining pollution, a byproduct of chemicals called volatile organic compounds that were used as degreasers.

Residents of Endicott had a mixed reaction to the announcement of the payment program.

"My gut reaction is that sounds like a buyout," said Edward M. Blaine, the director of a community outreach program who has owned a house in there for 31 years.

Mr. Blaine, 52, said he was not sure that he would accept the money and give up his right to sue if he cannot sell his house at market value. "If I had to say yes or no right now I'd probably say no," he said. "I need to think about it."

Joseph T. Havel has no doubt. "I'm not taking it," Mr. Havel said. "It's like a payoff, isn't it?"

Mr. Havel is a taxidermist who used to work in his basement until state environmental officials discovered that the plume of groundwater contamination was giving off vapors that were seeping into the many basements, including his. He has since abandoned the basement and built a workshop in the garage.

"If I tried to sell my house right now, I probably wouldn't get any more than \$60,000," he said. "People across the street from me have been trying to sell for over a year."

He said the house had an assessed value of \$102,000.

David A. Munro, an assistant attorney general who worked with I.B.M. to develop the program, said there was no evidence that property values had declined since the vapor problem was discovered.

Rose Sotak, a real estate agent whose parents owned a house in Endicott that they have willed to her 18-year-old daughter, Kristin, said sales records indicated that prices had actually increased from 1 to 5 percent a year in the last few years.

Ms. Sotak said she would accept I.B.M.'s offer and put the money toward Kristin's college tuition.

"The way I look at it," Mrs. Sotak said, "I.B.M. will be paying over \$5 million, which will be great for the economy here.

Press & Sun-Bulletin November 16, 2004

***Vapor intrusion focus of hearing on polluted sites;
Witnesses urge state, federal agencies to push for cleanup***

ENDICOTT -- Community activists, educators and politicians called Monday for a continued, aggressive, coordinated drive to clean up chemical pollution sites in Endicott, East Fishkill and other areas across the state.

More than a dozen witnesses presented their views, concerns and objections during a four-hour special hearing that focused on chemical vapor contamination.

The hearing, at the Endicott Visitor Center, was conducted by the state Assembly's Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation.

At issue is the state and federal governments' efforts to oversee and force the cleanup of industrial pollution sites.

In Endicott, industrial chemicals have contaminated the ground and spread under a large portion of the downtown area.

While the village's drinking water has been ruled safe to drink, the state Department of Environmental Conservation in August ordered IBM Corp. to accelerate steps to clean the solvents coming from its former North Street operation.

IBM also has installed ventilation systems in homes and buildings where chemical vapors have been detected. Meanwhile, federal and state agencies continue several studies and evaluations to determine whether the public health has been affected by pollution.

But for Bernadette Patrick of Endwell, who represents a committee called Citizens Acting to Restore Endicott's Environment, more work needs to be done in the Endicott clean-up effort.

Patrick called on state officials to press for expanded testing of homes for chemical contamination in areas abutting the identified contamination area in Endicott.

About 480 properties have been affected in Endicott.

Patrick urged the state and EPA to adopt a stricter standard for the chemical trichloroethylene (TCE).

"It is your fiduciary duty to ensure that this community and every community nationwide be protected from vapor intrusion stemming from soil and groundwater contamination caused by industries that jeopardize our health and well-being," Patrick said.

Debra Hall, a resident and community activist from Hopewell Junction in Dutchess County, said chemical-contamination problems remain troublesome to her and her neighbors. Her community faces a chemical pollution threat similar to Endicott's.

Hall also pointed to conflicting pollution criteria between state and federal agencies, adding that their differing numbers on TCE make it "very hard to feel confident about what constitutes a safe guidance number."

Hall said she is angry that the federal Environmental Protection Agency's planned adoption of chemical air pollution standards for TCE, first proposed in 2002, now is not expected until 2006.

"This is too important to keep putting off," she said. "Government needs to complete this assessment and do the right thing. Make true guidelines and standards, not for money reasons, but for health reasons."

Denis Callinan of East Fishkill, also in Dutchess County, was equally adamant in demanding stricter state environmental guidelines.

While Callinan did not address the committee, he said after the hearing, "We're looking for the state to establish standards that are consistent throughout the United States."

Joseph Graney, Binghamton University assistant professor of environmental geochemistry, proposed that new methods be found for cleaning up pollution. Methods in use now include venting chemical vapors into the atmosphere and a "pump and treat" method to cleanse contaminated groundwater.

Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-Hurley, who has pushed for an increased cleanup effort in Endicott, said the state environmental and health agencies need to take an aggressive stance in cleaning up pollution sites.

"Progress is now being made, but the public must remain involved to make sure this site remains a priority," Hinchey said of the Endicott-IBM pollution site.

IBM spokesman Todd Martin, who did not speak at Monday's hearing, pointed out IBM has been involved in a continuing remediation program overseen by the state DEC.

Martin said the company has undertaken an extensive public information program with meetings and newsletters; installed hundreds of ventilation systems in homes in Endicott; offered a financial settlement package to affected Endicott property owners; and given the village \$2.1 million, which is being used to install a chemical air stripper at a village water well and to hire an environmental consultant.

Both state Assemblyman and committee chairman Thomas DiNapoli, D-Great Neck, and Assemblyman Patrick R. Manning, R-East Fishkill, a committee member, said the hearing focused attention on the need for the state to take a strong stance in the chemical cleanup effort across New York.

Manning said the Legislature likely will pursue legislation that will mandate stricter environmental standards.

DiNapoli said similar hearings may be held in the East Fishkill area and other areas where airborne chemical pollution has been detected.

Sarasota Herald-Tribune December 7, 2004

Health officials to discuss Tallevast water test results

TALLEVAST-County health officials will reveal the results from indoor air, soil, vegetable and drinking water tests done by the state at a meeting Wednesday night.

The state Department of Health assessment team will also discuss beryllium sensitivity testing, said Randy Merchant, environmental administrator for the state department of health.

"We know that's a large piece that people are concerned about," Merchant said.

The indoor air, soil, vegetable and drinking water testing was requested by residents after ground water tests in the community showed high amounts of chemicals.

In particular, Trichloroethylene (TCE) was found at ground-water concentrations more than 10,000 times the state standard near some residents' yards.

TCE is a cleaning solvent that can be ingested by drinking tainted water. Over time and with high enough concentrations, ingestion of TCE has been linked to kidney and liver cancer.

Breathing in TCE vapors, which most often occur at the workplace, can cause headaches, nausea and dizziness. Long-term exposure can permanently damage the nervous system, causing

depression, anxiety, short-term memory loss, difficulty in thinking and other personality changes.

This summer, the state health assessment team tested two ears of corn and five oranges from two yards in Tallevast.

The department sent letters to the residents whose fruits and vegetables they tested for 48 different metals, and said they didn't find any.

The letters also told residents that TCE and other solvents found in ground water in their neighborhood do not accumulate significantly in fruits and vegetables.

Wanda Washington, vice president of a Tallevast community group, said the health department is coming out to show the residents they have a presence in the community. "I'm thinking it'll be a rehash of what they've already done."

The Indianapolis Star December 9, 2004

Martinsville files lawsuit over water cleanup costs

MARTINSVILLE, Ind. -- City officials want to install a filter to protect the municipal water supply, which faces contamination from a chemical suspected of causing cancer.

However, representatives for Masterwear Corp., the industrial dry-cleaning company accused of releasing the chemical into the soil more than a decade ago, is balking at the city's request to pay for the filter, which is estimated to add at least \$600,000 to the cleanup cost.

To turn up the heat, the city filed a lawsuit Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Indianapolis to recoup all expenses required to clean the water supply.

"We will continue to negotiate in the hope that we don't have to go to trial," Martinsville City Attorney Rod Bray said Wednesday, "as long as it can be settled on our terms."

Defendants in the lawsuit are Masterwear Corp.; James A. Reed and his wife, Linda Lou Mull Reed, the owners of Masterwear; and William J. Cure and Elizabeth J. Cure, former owners of the downtown Martinsville building where Masterwear operated from 1986 to 1992.

Attorneys for the Reeds and Cures weren't surprised by Tuesday's filing but had little to say about it. Masterwear's insurance carrier has agreed to pay for the cleanup.

"We have talked with city employees and will continue to do so to get this resolved," said Frank Deveau, the Cures' attorney.

City, state and federal officials believe Masterwear contaminated soil behind its plant with perchloroethylene (PCE). Masterwear used the solvent to clean oil from gloves and towels used by industries.

State inspectors believe drums of PCE-contaminated oils and other chemicals stacked on bare ground behind the building rusted and leaked. Over time, the chemical soaked into the soil, where groundwater carried it more than a mile to the city's wells.

The wells, on the city's northside, provide drinking water for about 12,000 residents. One well was so contaminated that it was shut down in December 2002.

Since the shutdown, the city has issued numerous boil orders and nearly ran out of water this past summer. Two other wells remain in use.

Bray said the city wants to install a filter at the contaminated well by January. The federal lawsuit will push for an immediate hearing seeking an order to require the defendants to pay for it.

City officials said they are prepared to pay for the filter, if necessary, and recoup that expense from the defendants.

Meanwhile, two teams from Astbury Environmental Engineering continue to clean PCE from the soil and water and PCE vapors out of nearby businesses.