

GRATIOT COUNTY

At last, the cleanup in St. Louis begins

Community began efforts 19 years ago

By Linda Gittleman

For the Morning Sun

When the news came during the Pine River Superfund Task Force meeting that the Environmental Protection Agency had at last allotted nearly \$10 million for the start of the plant site cleanup, there was applause.

Task Force Chairman Jim Hall said he could finally see the summit of the mountain they've been climbing for nearly two decades.

"We're moving from Toxic Town to Turnaround Town," he said.

Hall remembers well the beginning of the community actions to get a clean up 19 years ago.

"I thought (then) that in five years it'll be all cleaned up," he said, with a rueful laugh.

A great deal of preparation was needed and has already taken place. More is still needed in terms of the pump and treat system for the groundwater later on, but the thermal remediation

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could start in the fall, Hall said.

That clean up will be the in-place burning - via electricity- of the contaminants underground on the Velsicol Chemical plant site.

According to Tom Alcamo, the EPA's site manager and reported by task force secretary Jane Keon, "the electrical circuit construction is underway, with a ready date of July. The foundations are set for the thermal treatment equipment.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PINE RIVER SUPERFUND CITIZEN TASK FORCE

During World War II, Velsicol — then Michigan Chemical Corp. — was a prime supplier of DDT to the U.S. military. This railroad car funneled containers of the chemical out of St. Louis.

"The road through the plant site has been completed," she continued. "Groundwater modeling is underway to help determine how many pumps (are needed) and their optimal locations around the

plant site for the pump-and-treat system.

"A treatability study will be necessary," she reported. "Design work is underway for the second thermal treatment location, where the DDT plant used to be."

After all these years working to get rid of the contaminants left by Velsicol - DDT and PBB are two of the biggest - Hall said he feels he can rest assured.

"(The EPA) won't stop until they're done," Hall said. "They've already invested in stage 1."

Alcamo will report on the cleanup's impact on the community at next month's meeting.