by Greg Nelson
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Preliminary prep work has started at the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site in St. Louis. A new roadway is under construction through the 52-acre parcel, however, a new entrance gate onto M-46 to keep truck traffic from the adjacent residential neighborhood will not be built this year, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Project Manager Tom Alcamo told members of the Pine River Superfund Citizens Task Force during a recent meeting. The roadway alone will cost $1.25 million, he added. Also, concrete pads are being installed to accommodate the “in-situ” thermal treatment process, which is where the soil is heated by electricity to “volatize” the contaminants that are then captured with a filtering system. That will be used during the eventual cleanup of the site in what has been designated as Area 1. That’s estimated to cost between $12 million and $15 million. The EPA is still waiting to hear from the agency’s Prioritization Panel regarding whether or not funding will be available next year to begin remediation. The group met last month and Alcamo told the task force he has a “gut feeling” the plant site work would be funded. The task force has received support from Congressman John Moolenaar and U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters, who wrote a joint letter to Assistant EPA Administrator Mathy Stanislaus encouraging the Prioritization Panel to approve funding for the project. However, Alcamo doesn’t expect money to be available in 2017 to begin cleanup of the Burn Pit, another contaminated parcel west of the Pine River near Hidden Oaks Golf Course and the Orchard Hills subdivision. Design plans for both Area 1 and 2 should be completed by spring. The EPA expects to remove 100,000 tons of contaminated soil from the two areas and dispose of it off-site. A groundwater treatment system will also be installed. Prior to any work taking place the state must determine if groundwater on the property needs to be treated for metals before being pumped into the adjacent Pine River. Once underway, the treatment and capture of contaminants is expected to take about 12 months. The design work is fully funded but the $10 million to $20 million construction costs must be approved by the Prioritization Panel. Six millions kilowatts of electricity will be needed for the thermal treatment process. The EPA has hired GRP Engineering to design and oversee the construction of the new electrical circuit. That plan should also be finished by spring. Also last month the EPA removed 140 gallons of non-aqueous phase liquid (NAPL) from the groundwater collection trench manholes that was taken to be
incinerated off site. The agency continues to remove about 20,000 gallons of contaminated groundwater for the property each month for treatment in Detroit. In Potential Source Areas 3 and 4, chemical oxidation is the planned remediation method that will be used. More information on the Velsicol cleanup can be found online at www.epa.gov/superfund/velsicol-chemical-michigan.

Although funding for remediation of the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site in St. Louis still is not a certainty, preliminary work on the property is underway. A new roadway is under construction through the 52-acre parcel. Also, concrete pads are being installed to accommodate the "in-situ" thermal treatment process, which is where the soil in heated by electricity to "volatize" the contaminants that are then captured with a filtering system. In addition, the EPA removed 140 gallons of non-aqueous phase liquid (NAPL) last month from the groundwater collection trench manholes. (Herald photos – Nelson)