

GRATIOT COUNTY

First step of big cleanup begins in St. Louis

By **Linda Gittleman**
For *The Morning Sun*

At long last, restoration of the St. Louis Velsicol Chemical plant site begins.

It's starting small with a heat treating system on one acre of the 52 acre plant site, said Tom Alcamo, the project manager for the Environmental Protection Agency.

Alcamo, who has devoted years to the project, outlined this first step at a town hall type meeting Thursday night.

The one acre clean-up will cost about \$13 million, he said, adding that the entire plant site cleanup is expected to cost more than \$100 million.

That one acre - named Area 1 - was chosen first

in part because it contains some of the most toxic chemicals called DNAPL or dense, non aqueous phase liquid.

It's heavy, it sinks and it "sits on the ground water table," he said.

It's not the easiest type of contamination to clean either.

That's why the particular treatment for Area 1 will be

done on site.

While excavations are planned for another area, these Area 1 toxins won't have to be removed and the risk of contaminating others, including the workers, can be avoided, Alcamo said.

Basically, after the drilling of about 400 holes, the EPA will install rods to heat

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EPA's project manager for the St. Louis Superfund site Tom Alcamo discusses the clean up with some residents after the public meeting Thursday night.
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Cleanup

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the soil down to a level of about 30 feet.

It will, "boil the ground water and soil and capture the vapors," he said.

All that will be vacuumed up and sent via tubes to a cleaning system on site.

Enough electricity to "power about 775 homes for an entire year" will be needed, Alcamo said.

Monitoring systems to check on air quality as well as monitoring systems to determine how effective the system is working will be employed.

Air quality samples will be sent to a lab and there is a 24 hour turnaround, he said. Back up systems are

in place as well as duplication of equipment, Alcamo said. "Drilling starts next week," he said. "It will take about 8 to 10 weeks."

After that, the heating begins. And that's going to take a while.

"It will take 125 days to get the soil to the boiling point," he said.

Then, it needs "at least 90 days at boil," he said.

Following that, the sam-

pling begins to see how effective it's been. One member of the audience said she was concerned about the air quality during that 24 hour period of waiting for the results of the test samples. She was assured that a 24 hour exposure would not be a dangerous risk. And, she was told that the system is designed not to let any vapors into the air. Hazmat suits will be

needed by the less than a dozen workers but only during the drilling phase, said an employee of one of the companies assisting the EPA.

Alcamo also explained that the Area 1 project is fully funded - 90 percent by the EPA and ten percent by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Next year's project - Area 2 - however,

hadn't been funded yet.

"We haven't seen any problems," Alcamo said. "We don't have funding (for Area 2) but we'll get money for that. I just don't know how much."

A website is under construction now and it will provide updates along with photos, he said.

"I'm ecstatic that it's finally happening," Alcamo said.