

ST. LOUIS

Plans tighten for site clean up

Concerns ease over Velsicol plant

By Linda Gittleman

Special to The Sun

In January, the first phase of the Velsicol Chemical plant site clean up will begin in St. Louis.

Workers under the direction of Environmental Protection Agency will begin heating the ground, treating the toxic chemicals and capturing the fumes or gasses.

The process will take about 18 months and will cover a less than two acre section of the site.

Even though volatile organic chemicals - called VOCs - lie underground, EPA officials expect the \$9.7 million project to be uneventful.

Still, community members are concerned about possible snafus, said Scott Cornelius, who served as the St. Louis project manager for the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality before retiring and now serves as the Pine River Task Force technical advisor.

Air monitoring on the site is chief among those concerns, he said.

It was understood that air monitoring over a period of time - chronic levels - would take place but what if a more acute situation were

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to occur? What if vapors or gasses escaped due to an equipment failure, perhaps putting the public health at risk?

Theo Von Wallmenich.

who works for CH2MHill, a company hired by the EPA to help on the Superfund sites, put those fears to rest at a task force meeting this week.

He showed off the air monitoring gadgets that will be in place but also explained that the whole system is geared for warning

about what he called "upsets."

The system can sense and detect leaks and what the pressure is at any given time. It can, if needed, shut itself down immediately.

Even in the middle of the night.

"Everything is backed up." Von Wallmenich said.

"Operators will be able to respond to the upset."

Three operators will be living nearby and they will know if something goes wrong and respond.

Another concern, however slight, is the planning for an emergency evacuation. Has that been done? members wanted to know.

Emergency plans are now in the works but have not been completed yet, the task force was told.

Von Wallmenich was at pains to stress that such a scenario was extremely unlikely.

"We don't want to scare anyone," he said. "(Residents) should not be con-

cerned that there would be an evacuation."

A website now under construction will be operating in January. Those interested can access the Velsicol Chemical Corp. Superfund site for the latest information that will include air monitoring results.