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EPA, concerned citizens working on C&D cleanup

EPA

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third in a periodic series focusing on the C&D Recycling plant in Foster Township. High lead concentrations found in nearby wells a few years ago have caused alarm among township residents. This installment focuses on the working relationship between Foster residents and the Environmental Protection Agency, the group responsible for overseeing the cleanup of the site. Earlier installments in the series indicated a somewhat adversarial relationship. However, an EPA representative and a leader of a concerned citizens group paint a different picture.

By JEFF COX
Standard-Speaker Staff Writer

When Sharon Rohrbach needs information, she knows where to turn.

Mrs. Rohrbach has been a leader in ensuring the cleanup of the C&D site is executed properly by Nassau Metals Inc., a division of American Telephone and Telegraph Co. Nassau delivered cables, which were burned to reclaim lead, to the site in the early part of this decade.

Mrs. Rohrbach refuted statements, made in previous articles in this paper by Jane Sulima, who claimed the EPA has been hiding information.

"We haven't had that problem," Mrs. Rohrbach said about her group, the Concerned Citizens of Foster Township. "With their work plan, I have copies of it and copies of it are placed at the borough building for anyone to look at. Nothing is being kept hidden."

Further, she said the EPA has not been hesitant in providing any other information she requested.

"Whenever I called (the EPA), my calls were always returned," she said. "... There has been no public blockout."

Donna McCartney, who is the EPA's project officer on C&D, said the agency is required by law to keep the public informed of significant developments in the process.

"We work under ... very strict requirements of our responsibility to notify the public of our activities," she said. "Basically, what we have set up is a public affairs office."

She said Nancy Sinclair is in charge of the office and will be working with local people to keep them informed and garner their input.

"Nancy has agreed to have EPA meet with this group (the CCFT) on a regular basis to inform them of work done on the site," Ms. McCartney said.

Mrs. Sulima, who currently resides in Philadelphia but also has a residence near C&D, recently sent a letter to U.S. Sen. John Heinz, listing 55 concerns she has about the work plan. A member of Heinz's office said they have forwarded the letter to the EPA and are awaiting comment.

However, Ms. McCartney said she has not received the request from Heinz's office yet.

"I am aware of the letter only because Jane Sulima sent me a copy," she said. "Our congressional office would have relayed it to me."

Furthermore, she said Mrs. Sulima's letter could slow the cleanup.

"We will do our utmost to answer the technical questions in that letter," she said. "But the time it takes to do that will draw away from the time it takes to work on the project."

Also about the letter, she said, "I wouldn't call them all concerns."

That's because, she explained, some of the items are not technical matters, but are instead matters the EPA simply cannot answer.

For instance, Mrs. Sulima said "risk evaluation" should not be included in the work plan.

"Is risk evaluation a prelude to allowing deaths for purpose of increasing profit to private business?" Mrs. Sulima asked in the letter.

To that, Ms. McCartney said the department could only answer questions that have "technical merit" and that such a question is "impossible to respond to."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Rohrbach said her group plans to continue working with EPA.

"We had a lot of questions," she said. "There are still things that need to be worked out. It's a matter of both sides compromising to reach the correct solution."

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