

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE EAGLE ON 14 MAY 1981

Letters to the Editor

Threat to town well system?

To the Editor:

David Salvatore, an engineer with the department of Environmental Quality Engineering, in charge of the agency for all public sanitary landfills in the state of Mass., recently visited the Westford landfill site. After observing the milky white residue that is obviously visible on the surface of the wetlands abutting our landfill, he believes that the wetlands were polluted. To confirm what he strongly suspects, Mr. Salvatore will make recommendations to the Westford Board of Health, that spot testing of this water be done.

All of our town's drinking water is supplied by four interconnected wells and our main concern is one of 4 well systems. It is located immediately adjacent to the boundaries of the wetlands, which is only about 800 ft. from the landfill.

In a conversation with Mr. Salvatore he concluded that the landfill poses a

possible threat to our town's water supply.

Old tires, metal and other rubbish from the landfill litter the edges of the wetlands. Rain water has been running off high areas of the landfill causing erosion and proceeding down an embankment into the wetlands. Is our landfill being managed properly?

In violation of state regulations unsupervised after-hour dumping is being permitted in our town. I may be guilty of extreme cynicism but how do Westfordians know that chemicals are not being disposed of illegally.

The short and long term risks to our water supply should be examined to the fullest in order to protect ourselves and our families.

Susan Rose
Lorraine Ward
Dorothy Milton
Westford

MIT admits PCB dumping in landfill

Toxic scene

Marlene Switzer

The discovery of a sizeable quantity of PCB-filled capacitors in the town sanitary landfill on Saturday has led to swift, comprehensive action to effect an appropriate clean up. From the outset, Westford Board of Health, Hazardous Materials Committee, police and selectmen have been involved in investigating the matter and assuring that examination of the dump is kept to a minimum. The town's Hazardous Material Coordinator, Dennis Lawler, says there are strict state and federal regulations governing the disposal of PCB's (poly-chlorinated biphenyl), a suspected cancer-causing agent. "I think what has is something that was a stake and was resolved very quickly," Lawler says.

Full responsibility for the incident has been accepted by MIT's Millstone Hill Observatory. An MIT Millstone spokesman, Bob Brander, told Lawler that his Weston Rd. facility is experienced in disposing of transformers filled with PCB's, but did not realize that the old GE capacitors in the landfill were also PCB-contaminated.

The pile of some 600 pounds of



Clean up task

By Marlene Switzer

To prevent children and curious residents from tampering with the metals pile while the dump was closed on Sunday, a police guard was posted.

On Monday DEQE took soil samples and work began for Jet Liner Company of Stoughton, under contract to the State. "It's easy to tell what is contaminated... It leaves an oily mark," Lawler indicates.

DEQE engineers arrived to inspect the capacitor site and placed plastic over the contaminated area to prevent the PCB's from further leaching into the soil. Arrangements were made for a hazardous materials clean up crew to begin the intricate task of identifying the extent of contamination and determining the best way to remove the dangerous materials from the landfill.

"The whole pile is not contaminated," he continues, "but they will remove anything that is affected."

Noting that the soil below the metals pile is mostly clay, Lawler contends, "If they remove all soil where PCB's have been absorbed, there should be no residual effects."

Lawler says there is "little or

of Milstone open area, says Groton Rd. facility is expected in disposing of transformers filled with PCB's, but did not realize that the old GE capacitors left in the landfill were also PCB-impregnated.

The pile of some 60 capacitors, ("black boxes about twice the size of a bread box," according to Lawler), accumulated over a period of several days last week. Lawler speculates that some of the units were "shoved back into the metals heap as it grew," possibly causing some of the capacitors to rupture and spill their oily PCB contents.

Dr. Charles Menzie of WBH visited the site with Lawler in response to a call from Groton Rd. resident Douglas Morton, who discovered the capacitors at the landfill on Saturday. The PCB leakage, in Menzie and Lawler's opinion, posed a threat to the well-being of residents visiting the dump.

Although PCB's have been indicated as possible carcinogens,

Menzie says a more immediate danger lies in "the inhalation of particulates and skin contact." Chloracne, characterized by blistering and discoloration of the skin, is a common effect of PCB skin contact.

Menzie says "PCB's generally do not cause a water contamination problem" in such a circumstance because "they move very slowly through the soil."

Menzie and Lawler contacted local police after observing the capacitors at the landfill, and

Duty Sergeant Dave Hogg responded Saturday with a barricade and "poison" sign to block off the contaminated metals pile from residents.

"You would be amazed the number of people who ignored the signs," Lawler comments incredulously. "There are children and middle-aged children who like to pick over the pile at the dump," he adds.

Hogg also contacted MIT after landfill workers indicated that a

Employees from Jet Line Company gingerly carried out their assigned task of cleaning up "the PCB mistake" at Westford's landfill early this week. MIT will bear the total cost of the operation. (Photo by Gail Farney)



part in the drama was indicated. Saturday a call was made to the GE facility in Pittsfield for verification that the Pyranol capacitors did indeed contain PCB's.

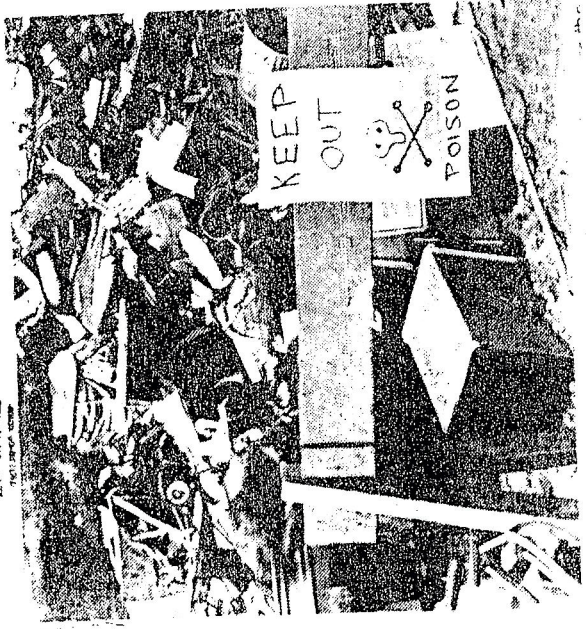
An affirmative answer led to the frenzied clean up effort this week. The full cost of the project will be shouldered by MIT.

Noting that the soil below the metals pile is mostly clay, Lawler contends, "if they remove all soil where PCB's have been absorbed, there should be no residual effects."

Lawler says there is "little or no chance for it (PCB's) to leak into the environment."

Suited in protective gear, Jet Line employees arrived early Tuesday morning to begin the task of placing the capacitors in steel drums filled with sawdust. Menzie indicates that the appropriate disposal method calls for draining and incinerating the oil solution.

The cost of the entire operation, including the special police detail, will be borne by MIT, which has admitted responsibility for the mistaken dumping.



MIT photo

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Dump-- Potential well threat

By EVAN CROFT

Mounting concern over possible town well contamination was brought to the attention of the Selectmen Tuesday night. Board member Thomas Borden asked cohorts to listen to Arnold O'Brien, an unscheduled speaker.

Arnold O'Brien of Cold Spring Road pointed out what, in his opinion, is an unavoidable problem. "The dump is nearing the town wells," he said. "Even

if the dump were closed today it could ultimately destroy the well field."

O'Brien explained that at the well head there exists a "cone of depression" which draws groundwater into the well from as far away as 1,000 feet or more. State law requires 400 feet around a well, but, O'Brien reported, the 400 foot number was not arrived at scientifically.

Richard Emmet countered that "clay

had been put on the west side to stop leaching" of groundwater into the wells. O'Brien explained the direction of groundwater flow is unknown and suggests that the west side clay only protects from one direction.

O'Brien's recommendation was to "ask the engineering firm that designed the dump site to come back and review the situation."

Water Superintendent Harold

Fletcher offered additional information. He informed the board that the closest well is 1500 feet from the dump, but "tubor" well sites are closer. Tubor wells are small wells located in a group over an acre of land. Not pumped continuously, a little water is drawn from each periodically.

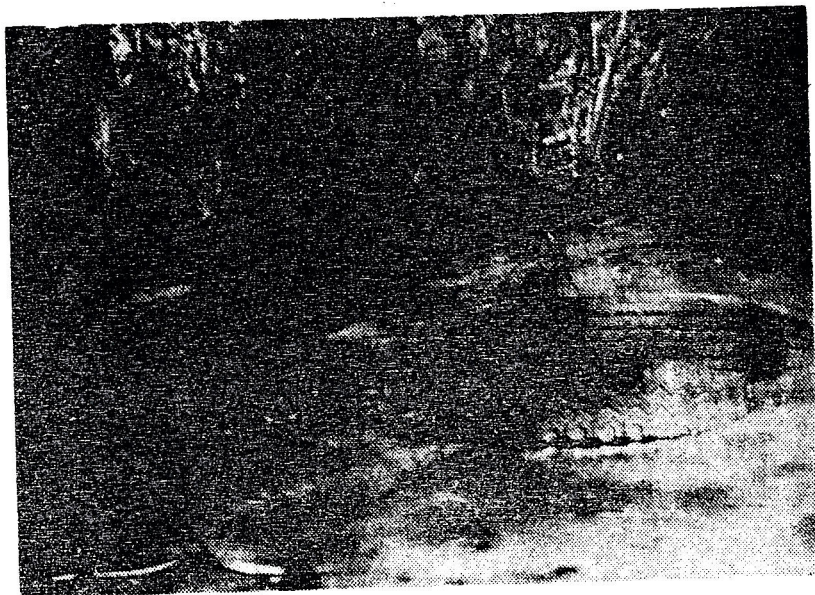
The present wellfield, he recounted, has been used for 75 years and the dump site "forever."

Fletcher added that his experience of several years ago when the dump caught fire had no ill effect on the wells when the thousands of gallons of water poured on became groundwater.

The test required to determine the effects of this type of pollution are VOA tests costing \$1K per well, explained Fletcher. Two years ago when the abandoned chemical drums were

discovered off Route 110, "all the wells in town were tested and were clean," he said.

Board member Ron Johnson observed that only initial information was available on the matter. Member Tom Borden's motion was approved to have an open meeting to be held on June 2, to hear statements from all interested parties.



It stinks! Water in the wetland directly behind Westford's sanitary landfill appears to be contaminated by water seeping down from the dumping mound. Reported distance to nearby town well system - 800 feet. (Photo by Leighton O'Connor)

Site of landfill at issue

WESTFORD - Hoping to determine whether the town dump may potentially threaten nearby wellfields, selectmen will meet Tuesday night with representatives from the water and conservation commissions and the sanitary landfill committee.

Selectmen called the meeting after hearing concerns voiced by Arnold O'Brien, of the conservation commission, that the location of the sanitary landfill may put the 19 wells, spread over one acre, in danger.

O'Brien has suggested selectmen hire an engineering firm to examine how the dump has developed over the years to determine whether the wellfields may be in danger of being contaminated.

"The town is at a crossroads," O'Brien said. "I think the selectmen might want to take a second look, to have an engineering firm take a second look at the dump."

He believes such a study would help "allay some fears" among residents about the quality of town water.

Expected to attend the meeting, scheduled to begin at 8 p.m. at the town hall, are water commissioners, O'Brien and Richard Lewis, chairman of the sanitary landfill relocation study committee.

Also on Tuesday night's agenda is a meeting with members of the town's cable television advisory committee and George Strimel, president of Commonwealth Cablevision, the only firm attempting to provide cable service to Westford.

Committee Chairman Gary Sullivan is urging residents to attend the meeting, slated for 8:30 p.m. Strimel will deliver a presentation of the application submitted by a Commonwealth subsidiary, Nashoba Valley Cablevision. Any questions from residents will be addressed by Strimel at that time, according to Sullivan.

Steven Boudreau, of the advisory committee, is also hoping more residents will become involved in the work being performed by the committee. Although the committee has posted its last several meetings on the town hall bulletin board, Strimel said, the only people to attend were committee members.

"The benefits a cable system, any cable system, offers to the town are tremendous," Boudreau said. "The committee has to decide what is best for the town, but we would really like to see citizen involvement in the pro-

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