

Lowell Sun

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Selectmen to check dumping complaints

WESTFORD - Complaints by residents that trucks are dumping after hours at the town's sanitary landfill have prompted selectmen to schedule a meeting with George Wyman, superintendent of streets, for June 16.

During a meeting this week about the potential threat the landfill poses to the nearby wellfield, several residents complained of seeing unusual activities at the landfill site, including unsupervised dumping.

Selectmen were disturbed when one woman reported seeing "flatbed trucks loaded with barrels come in at 3 o'clock in the morning." The drivers of the trucks unlock the gate with a key, and lock it after dumping the barrels, she said.

Although Wyman disputed the claim, a number of residents in the audience vocally agreed with the woman.

"Please believe us," she implored selectmen. "It's true. We would not lie about a thing like this."

Susan Koss, of 112 Cold Spring Road, reported seeing trucks dump rubbish when the landfill attendant was not present. The rubbish, she said, is left uncovered.

Wyman was ordered by the board to change the locks, and selectmen will discuss the problem of unauthorized dumping along with complaints about the operation of the landfill at the scheduled meeting with Wyman.

Roger Lachance, of 34 West Prescott St., produced reports from the state Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (DEQE) which he said back up many of the residents' complaints.

Lachance charged that improper cover is being used on the side of the landfill which borders wetlands feeding the wells. Wyman disagreed with Lachance, saying that the embankment near the wetlands has been properly covered with clay, loam and seed.

"Do we have to wait to become another Woburn before some action is taken? Do we have to wait until our kids are sick, dying of leukemia, before someone with authority looks into this?" Lachance asked.

Residents are also very concerned about the lack of a fence and easy access into the site.

The search for a new location for the landfill has been "draggin on" since 1972, said Steven Connell, 20 Abbot St., as he urged selectmen to take action to "terminate" the current landfill site.

"This is a potential time bomb," Connell said. "Before the landfill, what was there? There is not a panic situation now, but the committee should be working with the utmost speed to get it (the landfill) out of there. For us to keep dragging out feet, since 1972, is a head-in-the-sand attitude."

Westford wellfield pollution possibility studied by town

By JANICE BARRY
Sun Staff

WESTFORD — The town's landfill on Country Road poses such a potential hazard to a nearby wellfield that selectmen have agreed to establish a committee to study whether the wells are in danger of being contaminated.

After listening to the worries expressed by a number of residents, selectmen this week agreed to appoint a committee to determine whether a "plume of pollution" is heading toward the wells and what form of monitoring system may be necessary on the site.

The meeting was scheduled after selectmen heard Arnold O'Brien, of the conservation commission, voice concern that the 19 wells could be in danger of being contaminated. That concern was multiplied many times over Tuesday night, however, when many residents turned out to urge selectmen to take action to study the site.

"There is a potential for pollution of

the wells by the landfill. There always has been, and there always will be as long as the landfill is there," O'Brien said. "There has been no indication that there is any problem now, but we don't know what the future holds."

He suggested the committee be formed to "study the site, to understand the nature of the deposits (at the landfill), to find out the direction of the ground water flow and the nature of the pollution plume, if there is one."

O'Brien told the residents that they should "assume there is a plume of pollution moving from the landfill, probably in the direction of the wells."

Such "plumes" have been tracked moving steadily outward at other sites, he said. "It should be possible to put monitoring wells around the perimeter of the landfill to give advance warning if the wells are in danger," he added.

Outlining what he believes the monitoring committee's duties should be, O'Brien suggested the committee "de-

cide what kind of action to take, the nature and scope of the monitoring system, and how much it will cost."

According to water commissioner Harold Fletcher, the wells on Country Road serve only the town center, which represents about 30 percent of the town. The water is tested every two weeks for bacteria, and once a year for such chemicals as sodium.

The extensive testing which would determine whether the wells have been polluted by other chemicals is done "only if the state requires it," Fletcher said. However, in light of the growing concern in town, a test for all chemicals was performed Thursday and results are expected soon, he said.

When asked why the testing is not done regularly, Fletcher explained that the test costs \$1,000 each time it is performed. A monthly testing fee would add up to \$12,000 by the end of the year, and would be reflected in the water bills.

"The \$12,000 is insignificant," retorted one resident as the audience burst into applause. "I think the town would be more than willing to pick up a \$12,000 tab rather than see someone's child go to the hospital."

The committee should also determine what the expected life span of the wells are, believes Peter Thorstensen, the town's hazardous waste coordinator. The wells, he said, should be viewed as a "mine" which — like a gold mine — produces only for a limited time.

"The situation we have here is not unique. We need a rational monitoring program to determine the life of our water mine," Thorstensen said. "That wellfield has a finite life. We have to determine how long that wellfield will last. Nothing lasts forever, as you all know."

Richard Lewis, chairman of the sanitary landfill relocation study committee, agreed with the residents, but said the current operation is much safer than the uncontrolled dumping on the site in the past. The wells have been used since 1907, just about as long as the dump has been at the location, he said.

"If there is any pollution found, there is not a thing that can be done to prevent it because it was done over the last 30 years," Lewis said.

Fear for town well

By EVAN CROFT

Mr. Arnold O'Brien, Conservation Commission, addressed Selectmen and more than 50 residents on Tuesday night. "There is a potential for pollution of the wells" from the adjacent landfill, he said. The wells in question serve Westford Center and Forge Village.

"Little data exists to make decisions on the life of the wells unless the wells are continuously monitored," O'Brien said. He recommended to the selectmen that a hydro/geological committee be appointed to accumulate data on "what deposits are in the landfill/well area, where the ground water flows are, and what pollution is active."

"Assume a 'plume' of underground pollutants are moving in the direction of the wells. In other sites, the movement of 'plumes' are advancing at six, 10 or 20 feet per year," O'Brien explained. We have "no data" on this for our own landfill. "If the wells are monitored," he continued, "we can have advanced warning and if caught early enough there may be time to

determine how to make corrections and how much it will cost."

The nature of the pollution was described by Mr. Schaefer of 10 Longmeadow Road, and residents abutting the landfill. Mr. Schaefer, a geologist, told the gathering that "common household chemicals are not in themselves dangerous but 'daughter' chemicals (household chemicals modified by other chemicals or exposure) can be hazardous." He stated as an example that automobile oil contains additives that can be polluting and recommended that barrels be put at the dump for oil disposal.

Mrs. Susan Rose of Cold Spring Road, described her experience with one truck at 5 a.m. that she feels was dumping illegally. The truck driver told her he was dumping rubbish from the schools, but in her opinion the trash looked industrial. Numerous other residents adjoining the landfill reported trucks dumping without highway department supervision at all hours of the night with keys for access and in

some instances they were from neighboring towns.

The question of what was being dumped was not determined. The general concern was voiced by one resident who asked "Will this be another Woburn," to general applause. Steve Connell of 2 Elm Street, stated, "we don't have any idea of what was put in there years before... The landfill is a time

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surface," insufficient fencing and a note indicating large wetlands are affected.

Richard Lewis of the Sanitary Landfill Committee, said that "residents concerns are well founded." The landfill, he said, is designed to have less pollution by running rain water off to the sides of the dump and not through the interior of the landfill mound. "The final package will be effective... But if pollution is found, nothing can be done to stop it... It's been there for 30 years."

Peter Thorstensen, Hazard Waste Coordinator, added, "This is not a unique situation." Other communities are going through the same discussions, he added. The fact remains "that what is in the ground is in the ground; we can't ship it to Buffalo..." "If the water migrates we must monitor that to determine how long the well field will last. Nothing lasts forever." Thorstensen concluded.

Harold Fletcher, Water Commissioner, in response to Mr. Emmet's concern about immediate water quality, told the gathering that "VOA test samples were taken last Thursday." The

bomb." Several other pertinent statements added to the concern. "We should be working to get out of there," and "It's not a problem now but when will it be? We must remember that 21 communities have lost their water supplies."

Roger Lachance of W. Prescott Street, displayed DEQE reports from 1979 and 1980 citing "debris sticking through the

VOA tests water for all types of pollutants. This was last done two years ago when the chemical barrels were found on Rt. 110. The water was found to be clean at that time. The results from the present test will be returned next week. The tests cost \$2K to \$12K and if done monthly would amount to \$12K yearly. One of the audience stated that cost is nothing compared to "watching a child go to the hospital" with a serious ailment caused by an unknown pollutant.

Mr. Fletcher added that the town has four well sites presently unused but tested and approved if needed. Mr. Fletcher thanked the town for voting funds for the purchase of another land parcel that has yet to be tested.

The selectmen will act on the issue by meeting with Pete Wyman to discuss changing the locks on the dump and sealing other possible entrances. In addition, the recommended monitoring committee will be appointed and an operating funds will be requested at the next town meeting.

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PCB dumping down-played

By BENJAMIN HOROWITZ
Sun Staff

WESTFORD — Authorities say there was probably "no serious contamination" from the disposal of at least 20 transformers containing PCB, but there is a "good possibility" some soil was damaged at the Cold Spring Road landfill.

The cleanup of the hazardous waste material starts today (Tuesday), funded by Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Lincoln Labs, whose officials have acknowledged responsibility for leaving the capacitors.

The work, supervised by the state Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (DEQE), will be performed by Jet Lines Services, Inc., a Stoughton pollution control company.

Jet Line supervisor Richard Analoro said the extent of contamination should be determined today, after his company sifts "by hand" through the metal salvage pile where the capacitors were dumped.

"We don't know how many are in there, and how many are ruptured," Analoro noted. He estimated it will take "two or three days" to complete the clean-up.

Analoro said there is a "good possibility" some of the soil in the landfill was contaminated by the PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), a cancer-causing chemical which was leaking from some of the capacitors.

But DEQE Sanitary Engineer Tom Bienkiewicz and local Water Superintendent Harold Fletcher, said they doubt that there is any serious contamination, despite the presence of the town's Forge Village Well just 500 feet away.

"Any real contamination will be minimal," Bienkiewicz said. "It (the PCB) is mostly on the surface."

The capacitors were left at the landfill "Wednesday or Thursday" by workers who were unaware of what they contained, said Dr. Antonio Pensa, group leader for Lincoln Labs Westford radar station on Mill Stone Hill.

The transformers were part of an old power supply, which hadn't been used for many years, he said.

"It was an accident," Pensa added. "We (Lincoln Labs) are assuming full responsibility. That's why we're cleaning up as quickly as possible."
Meeting at the landfill yesterday

Westford

(Monday) afternoon to coordinate plans for the cleanup were officials from Jet Line, the DEQE, MIT, and the town's police department, board of health, hazardous waste committee, water department, and selectmen's office.

Board of Health Vice Chairman Mark Mulligan said he was satisfied that MIT and the state are cooperating to clean up the area as quickly as

possible, at no cost to the town.

"DEQE will be reporting back to the board of health," he said. "This is the first time this has happened here. They (MIT workers) didn't really know what it was."

The containers, which look like large automobile batteries, were discovered Saturday by local resident Douglas Martin, who informed board of health member Charles Menzie.

Menzie then visited the landfill with Dennis Lawler, the town's hazardous waste coordinator.

Finding the General Electric-manufactured capacitors, Lawler and Menzie contacted the firm's Pittsfield office. An official there "said if they were made of Pyranol and were

old, chances were extremely high they had PCB in them," Lawler noted.

Subsequent tests confirmed the presence of the hazardous material.

Danger signs have been posted at the landfill by board of health officials, who urge parents to keep their children away from the metal salvage pile.

A police officer is also expected to stand guard in the area.

The board of health recently started a well monitoring program around the landfill to see if there is any water contamination in the area. Menzie said. Preliminary indications show no contamination, he said, but analysis of the first set of tests has not been completed.



THE COLD SPRING ROAD LANDFILL IN WESTFORD
...where the transformers containing PCB were dumped

Sun Staff Photo by David Brown

DEQE refutes claims of wetlands pollution

By Colin Hickey

While residents raised the question of possible wetlands contamination and potential danger to town wells, a Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (DEQE) official yesterday denied there is any need for residents to be alarmed by discolored water and the presence of an empty drum.

The issue was raised at Tuesday's selectmen meeting when Westford residents Joanne Barnett and Chris Pude reported that James Williams from DEQE told them he had found nearby wetlands contaminated in a recent investigation.

Barnett and Pude showed selectmen a photograph of a large, empty 50-gallon drum dumped in the wetlands area behind the town landfill, in close proximity to town wells. The markings on the empty drum identified it as a 1,1,1-trichloroethane. They also reported that they had found the water in the area stained a dark, red color.

1,1,1-trichloroethane is a non-flammable chemical, insoluble in water, that is found in rug and upholstery cleaners, shoe-care products, and spot removers. Its fumes are extremely dangerous to inhale, but it is not considered a carcinogen, according to the *Household Pollutants Guide*.

In an earlier phone conversation, Barnett told the Eagle that Williams had examined this same area of wetlands. Barnett

said Williams reportedly told her the water "was bright red with leeching" from the landfill and that residents "should really be concerned about the water." Barnett also claimed that Williams told her that the wetlands were so badly contaminated they no longer froze, and that a drum with toxic chemical markings had been found.

Williams could not be reached for comment before this newspaper's deadline, but Mark Begley, a senior sanitary engineer from the DEQE Division of Solid and Hazardous Waste, said that there was no need for citizens to be alarmed. Begley, who talked to Williams and said he had seen the site in question, confirmed that, while there is some red staining of the water, it is "due to iron...basically rust material." He said that the "iron rust has been there for years" and does not pose any health danger.

Begley explained that there was no lid on the 50-gallon drum, and that DEQE believed that all the 1,1,1-trichloroethane that it contained was used years before the drum was dumped into the wetlands. He said the drum was probably used as a trash can for several years. No chemical samples were taken, according to Begley, but he said that the water supply division of the DEQE will be consulted on the matter.

As for the inability for the wetlands to freeze, Barnett said she initiated contact with DEQE a few weeks earlier on another matter.

Selectmen requested Hazardous Waste Coordinator Dennis Lawler and Highway Superintendent George Wyman, who is in charge of the landfill, to investigate the possible contamination of wetlands.

DEQE official refutes contamination claims

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lands' water to freeze, Begley said this was probably caused by the warmer water that has leached into the wetlands from the landfill. Begley explained that the bacterial activity that results from decomposition in a landfill commonly leads to a release of energy that raises the temperature of water underneath the landfill. He added that water around a landfill commonly has more minerals in it than normal water and that this would tend to give it a lower freezing point.

Williams' examination of the wetlands, Begley explained, was part of a "routine inspection." "We check all the landfills in the area at least a couple times a year," Begley said. He stressed that "there are problems at the landfill" in that plans for dealing with it are out-of-date. He added that DEQE intends to send a letter to the Westford Board of Health in the near future to ar-

range a meeting concerning the landfill. "Just the proximity of a landfill to the wells could be considered a concern," Begley said.

Barnett, an abutter of the landfill, and Pude looked at the area Williams examined on Monday. Pude claimed that Williams discovered the contamination either Tuesday or Wednesday of last week, and told her of his findings

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