ST. CHARLES POST M-F 32,000

June 27, 1992
ARC 2 copies

WELDON SPRING

Discussions Set June 30 On Chemical Cleanup

By Margaret Gillerman
Of the St. Charles Post

U.S. Energy Department officials, for the first time, will discuss on June 30 specific risks associated with the cleanup and the ultimate disposal of low-level radioactive waste at the defunct Weldon Spring chemical plant.

The Weldon Spring site was used as a uranium ore processing plant during the 1950s and 1960s and is contaminated with radioactive waste and various chemicals.

The forum is intended to give people a chance to ask technical questions about the risks involved in a cleanup, said Stephen H.

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Cleanup

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McCracken, project manager for the Weldon Spring Site Remedial Action Project.

A final proposal for the cleanup of the waste is due out this fall.

A part of the final plan will be an evaluation of risks, and the report will conclude that "the risks are very minimal," McCracken said. "The risk is very low to anyone off-site."

"We still have a very strong commitment ... to the [Francis Howell] high school. Our goal is there will never be any contamination that will reach that high school."

McCracken acknowledged disagreement about risks will occur. He said public hearings would be held later to allow people to express their views and voice their concerns about potential hazards.

Controversy already has developed over plans to funnel treated water from the site into the Missouri River.

McCracken said cleanup needed to be started soon because contaminants were already leaching into the soil and ground water.

"This (June 30) workshop is a briefing on the reports we are preparing ... and will give a good idea of what we're thinking about doing," he said. "It's a workshop to talk about the science of what we've done."

"There will be plenty of opportunity for people to voice their concerns ... and to discuss and comment on these documents," he said. "I don't want people to feel this is their last chance."

As many as 100 people have been invited, including representatives of St. Charles Countians Against Hazardous Waste, the Coalition for the Environment, local elected officials, and members of the Francis Howell School Board.

"Certainly, if other people have an interest and let us know, we'll be happy to accommodate them," McCracken said. He asked that people interested in attending sign up by June 25 by calling 441-8978.

McCracken said cleanup needed to be started soon because contaminants were already leaching into the soil and ground water.

The event will be between 6:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in St. Peters.

The cleanup will entail excavating contaminated materials from buildings, soil and the quarry and treating and disposing of the contaminants.

The untreated, contaminated waste could be disposed of in one of the three ways, McCracken said.

These are:

- On-site.
- At a Department of Energy facility in Hanford, Wash. or
- At a commercial disposal site for low-level radioactive waste that has yet to be licensed. It's anticipated one will be licensed in Clive, Utah, he said.

At previous workshops, McCracken and other discussed the location of the contaminants in the soil and water and the site geology as well as waste treatment and disposal technologies.

This workshop will evaluate the risks to workers doing the cleanup at the site, and the risk to people off-site, including neighbors, both during and after cleanup, McCracken said.

Among the topics will be:

- How a risk assessment is performed.
- The results of the risk assessment at Weldon Spring,

"Because it is impossible to discuss risk assessment without getting into some serious math and science, the workshop will be a little more on the technical side than its two predecessors," McCracken said.

Among those speaking at the June 30 meeting will be representatives from M.K. Ferguson, the federal agency's prime contractor for the cleanup, and from Argonne National Laboratories.