JOURNAL, Sunday, July 29, 1990

Public hearing will discuss treating of chemical plant's tainted water

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ST. CHARLES COUNTY — Residents will be able to voice opinions at a public hearing on plans to treat contaminated water from waste pits at the Weldon Spring Chemical Plant and discharge the water into the Missouri River.

The hearing is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Aug. 16 in St. Charles at The Columns Conference Center, 711 Fair Lane near the intersection of Highway 94 and I-70.

U.S. Department of Energy officials plan to construct a water-treatment plant at the chemical-plant site on Highway 94 about 13 miles southwest of St. Charles.

Steve McCracken, project manager for DOE at the site, said Wednesday that the hearing will deal with cleanup activities that are part of the agency's overall cleanup plan for the site.

Portions of the former Atomic Energy Commission processing facility are contaminated by radioactive and chemical wastes.

The water to be treated includes the contents of four waste pits, two ponds and drainage and stormwater that would be collected from a temporary storage area for waste removed from a nearby nine-acre quarry site.

The four waste pits may contain about 57 million gallons of water. The water is expected to be treated to render it "close to drinking water standards," according to federal officials.

The pit water contains a number of contaminants including uranium, radium, arsenic, fluoride and nitrates. The two ponds contain uranium, chloride and nitrates.

Once treated, the water would be discharged southeast from two effluent ponds along a drainage ditch to the Missouri River.

A permit from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources is required before the water is released into the river.

The hearing will give residents from St. Louis and St. Charles counties a chance to comment on the plans, federal officials say.

The water discharged would be about 10 miles upstream from St. Louis County drinking-water intakes.

The hearing is to be the second held on cleanup actions at the plant site and adjacent properties.

In March, federal officials held a public hearing on proposals to remove radioactive wastes from the quarry. Another proposed water-treatment plant to be built at the quarry site would treat contaminated water.

Documents outlining detailed plans for the plant site are available at the St. Charles City-County Library branches, the Francis Howell High School library and in the public reading room at the Weldon Spring Site Remedial Action Project, 7295 Highway 94 South.

Comments on the document can be made until Aug. 27. Comments on the state permit for discharging the water can be made until Sept. 4.