

## The Post-Crescent

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### PCB burial attacked

*Ed Culhane, Post-Crescent staff writer*

NEENAH -- Environmental regulators faced an aggressive and largely unhappy crowd Wednesday as they sought to explain the consent decree that will fund the cleanup of PCBs in Little Lake Butte des Morts.

The problem was that few of the more than 120 people that crowded into a meeting room at the Neenah Public Library wanted to talk about the consent decree. Most were from the Town of Vinland. They wanted to talk about the government's decision to landfill **PCB** sediments from the lake, since the probable landfill site is in their community.

Even before the floor was opened to questions, Randy Stone, an attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice, could see what was coming.

"I will tell you ahead of time that this consent decree says nothing about that," Stone said of the landfill debate.

Those who see a **PCB**-filled landfill in their future were undeterred. They believe glass furnace technology, recently developed by the Minergy Corp. in Neenah, should be used to destroy the PCBs and recycle the sediments into an inert glass aggregate that can be used in road construction.

They believe the cleanup should be delayed, if necessary, while questions about the cost of the Minergy option are answered.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are man-made chemicals once used in the production of carbonless paper. Seven paper companies discharged PCBs into the 39-mile lower Fox River between 1957 and 1971.

The use of PCBs in the United States was banned in 1976.

PCBs in river sediments enter the food chain, causing reproductive failure and birth defects in some fish-eating birds and mammals. PCBs have been linked to developmental problems in children who have been linked to developmental problems in the children of mothers who consumed contaminated fish.

Leonard Leverage, Winnebago County solid waste director, opened a theme at the meeting that would be visited often during the next two hours, citing the published preference of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for remediation technologies that destroy organic pollutants rather than disposing of them in landfills.

"I don't think there is anyone in this room that disagrees with the dredging decision," said Leverage. "I think everyone disagrees with the decision for final disposal."

His remarks drew a burst of applause.

The consent decree, in which there was little interest, is the document under which two paper companies Glatfelter and WTM I, have agreed to put a total of \$50 million in an escrow account and to manage the cleanup. Another \$10 million comes from funds previously released by Appleton Papers and the NCR Corporation. Glatfelter and WTM I will also make a \$3 million down payment toward a Natural Resource Damage Assessment to compensate the public for the lost use of a damaged river.

It can be found on the Internet at [www.usdoj.gov/enrd/open.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/enrd/open.html). The 30-day period of public comment ends Nov. 17. All written comments will be provided to the federal judge reviewing the consent decree and the EPA is required to respond to them. But the judge is only legally obliged to consider comments on the content of the consent decree.

Chuck Koehler, attorney for the Town of Vinland, asked whether EPA officials would consider asking the judge to delay a decision on the consent decree to give the DNR and EPA time to reconsider glass furnace technology, or vitrification, for the

Little Lake Butte des Morts portion of the lower Fox River.

He said that during public comment on the Record of Decision (the document that does address landfill issues) the full facts of Minergy were not available to the public.

Stone said the two documents are not connected in that fashion. Nothing in the consent decree precludes the DNR and EPA from amending the ROD.

Peter Carlson, who serves on the Town of Vinland landfill siting committee, asked whether the government faced a problem with that, however. If the government tried to change the plan, and require the companies to use vitrification, couldn't the companies pull out of the deal? Wouldn't that leave the government back where it started?

"Probably," said Stone.

Jim Hahnenberg, EPA project manager, said the paper companies are comfortable with the long-term liability that comes with owning a landfill because they have experience with landfills, know they are safe and understand that the liability, while real, is small.

Bruce Brazee, a town resident, had heard enough. Why won't the government order the PCBs destroyed, he asked, clearly angry.

"The PCBs would be gone, but you're telling him and telling us that you're going to put it in our back yard. I have a problem with that."

Someone else shouted from the crowd -- "Is this about cost, or is this about method?"

Greg Hill, a DNR administrator, said complex cleanups under Superfund law are about both. The paper companies are paying for the cleanup with limited funds. Dredging and landfill disposal is a proven technology where the costs known. Minergy's cost estimates are too high, he said, when compared to the two or three years that dredging and landfill disposal will take.

"In order to get a lower price, they (Minergy) would have to process it over seven years," Hill said.

Charles Farrey, a member of the town board, said the town isn't quitting. Town officials will continue to press to have the Record of Decision amended, he said.

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