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Owens introduces bill to keep PCBs out of landfills

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MADISON -- A bill that would keep PCB-contaminated river sediments out of landfills will be the focus of a legislative hearing Monday.

If passed, the bill introduced by state Rep. Carol Owens, R-Oshkosh, would stop state and federal officials from burying 784,000 cubic yards of Fox River sediments in a Winnebago County landfill.

Owens introduced the bill in response to concerns raised by residents in the Town of **Vinland**, which is between Neenah and Oshkosh.

Some **Vinland** residents fear their groundwater could be contaminated after the state Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency follow through on a Fox River cleanup plan.

"There is no landfill liner that is foolproof," Owens said. "They are made by man."

But a DNR official said the bill could create problems for the \$60 million cleanup of the Little Lake Butte des Morts portion of the Fox River.

"This legislation would cut off what we think is a scientific, technically defensible and appropriate mechanism for removing those PCBs from the river," said Greg Hill, a DNR administrator.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are manmade chemicals once used in the paper industry. They have been linked to cancer, birth problems and animal defects. PCBs already exist in other landfilled materials. The bill would only apply to landfilled sediments.

Two paper companies, Glatfelter and WTM I (formerly Wisconsin Tissue Mills), have each agreed to pay \$25 million for the cleanup. In addition, Georgia-Pacific offered the use of its **Vinland** landfill for the sediments.

Owens said that when the cleanup plans were negotiated, a new technology called vitrification, which melts PCB-contaminated sediments into glass aggregate, destroying the PCBs, wasn't considered.

"Now we have this method available and the decisions had all been made," Owens said.

Hill said the technology would raise the cost of the cleanup by \$40 million to about \$100 million. He said it could also force the parties of the agreement to reopen negotiations. He also said vitrification hasn't been tested on a large scale.

Hill said the landfill disposal option was the result of a long process that included input from paper companies, environmental officials and local residents.

Owens said that while she is not sure of the bill's chances in the Legislature, she is hopeful it at least gets a hearing.

"If nothing else comes of this, at least it starts a dialogue," she said.

Hill said the disposal of river sediments in the **Vinland** landfill probably will begin next year.