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Doyle urges study of melting PCBs

Ben Jones, P-C Madison bureau chief

MADISON -- Gov. Jim Doyle has directed the state Department of Natural Resources to determine if it's feasible to use a process that would keep contaminated Fox River sediments out of landfills.

Doyle spokesman Dan Leistikow said last week the governor asked the DNR to study the possibility of vitrification for the Little Lake Butte des Morts segment of the Fox River cleanup.

"He has asked them to get back to him as soon as possible," Leistikow said. "(Doyle) always thought that we should consider every possible option."

Vitrification is a process that melts sediments containing PCBs into a safe substance that can be used in building projects such as roads.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a manmade chemical discharged by seven paper companies into the Fox River until the early 1970s. PCBs have been linked to birth defects in animals and people.

Under the current plan, a first phase in the cleanup of the Fox River would landfill 784,000 cubic yards of PCB contaminated river sediments from Little Lake Butte des Morts.

Residents near the landfill in the Winnebago County Town of **Vinland** have opposed the disposal plan, and have said cleanup partners, which include the state, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and paper companies, should consider vitrification instead.

DNR officials and others have raised concerns about the cost of vitrification. But people in **Vinland** fear that landfilling will result in dangerous chemicals leaking into their water supply.

On Tuesday, three state lawmakers sent two letters to Doyle urging him to consider vitrification.

State Rep. Terri McCormick, R-Grand Chute, who corresponded individually with Doyle, said her research indicates the cost of vitrification would be similar or less than the cost of dumping the waste into a landfill.

"From what I can see, there may be a more cost-effective method in disposal of this waste that would take care of it once and for all," she said.

State Sen. Mike Ellis, R-Neenah, said he met with the president of Minergy Corp., a company that designed a furnace capable of vitrification. Ellis also is not convinced that vitrification is more expensive than landfill disposal.

"When properly compared apples to apples, vitrification is in the same ballpark as the cost of landfilling," Ellis said.

State Rep. Dean Kaufert, R-Neenah, said the letter he and Ellis sent to Doyle was meant to stress the importance of the issue.

"The people in **Vinland** are still hopeful that the governor can intervene and the DNR will change their minds and keep the stuff out of their back yards," Kaufert said.

A detailed study of vitrification also may occur. In response to pressure from **Vinland** town supervisors, state and federal officials are working out the terms of an agreement that would allow a detailed cost comparison of vitrification and landfilling of PCBs.

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