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New PCB landfill good; studying vitrification better

staff

It's a change of venue for the disposal of PCB-laden sediment from Little Lake Butte des Morts. But, fortunately, it's not going to mean a change in the plan to consider melting the sediment instead of putting them in a landfill.

Instead of the sediment being dumped in a landfill in the Winnebago County Town of **Vinland**, it'll go to a landfill in the Town of Chilton, according to an announcement Tuesday.

That's a victory for the **Vinland** officials and residents who didn't want the PCBs in the Georgia-Pacific Corp.-owned landfill. They were worried about the long-term risks to groundwater in the town and had complained loud and long to state officials.

And it's a victory for GW Partners, the coalition of paper companies P.H. Glatfelter and WTM 1. Its Little Lake Cleanup Team is coordinating the dredging and disposal of sediment from the lake. That's supposed to start this year, with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Natural Resources mandating that the sediment be placed in a landfill.

To its credit, GW Partners, didn't push the **Vinland** option down residents' throats and instead reached an agreement with Onyx Waste Services to put the PCBs in Onyx's Hickory Meadows Landfill. Hickory Meadows contains PCB-laden sediment from two other cleanup sites in eastern Wisconsin and is already licensed to take the type of sediment that will come from Little Lake Butte des Morts.

Given **Vinland**'s concerns -- and the lawsuit it filed against the DNR -- the Town of Chilton landfill is the best option of the two. That said, however, Gov. Jim Doyle is right in confirming his commitment to having the DNR take a closer look at vitrification, the process by which the sediment could be melted into glass aggregate for the construction industry.

The **Vinland** folks were pushing for vitrification as a better solution than a landfill and had won the support of several area legislators. Last week, Doyle told the DNR to study the feasibility and, more important, the costs using vitrification with the Fox River dredging.

The Little Lake Butte des Morts project is just a small part of an enormous project. While the landfill switch solves one concern, it's encouraging that the bigger picture of what to do with the bulk of the PCBs is still in focus.

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