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Burning PCB spoils still an option

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MADISON -- The state hasn't given up on vitrification as a possible disposal method for PCB-tainted sediment dredged from the lower Fox River, a state official said Thursday.

Greg Hill, sediment management section chief for the Department of Natural Resources, said the new super-heating technology will receive further study as a disposal method for dealing with the bulk of sediment removed from the river as part of an estimated \$400 million cleanup.

Hill took up the issue after top officials of Outagamie, Winnebago and Calumet counties jointly voiced concerns the state already had decided to bury all the spoils in specially designed landfill cells, a plan they say exposes future generations to health risks.

"We have to ask ourselves, 'Is this really the best thing to do with this material?'" Calumet County Board Chairman Merlin Gentz asked. "Do we want to make this a situation where our children and grandchildren have to deal with it again?"

Winnebago County Executive Jane Van De Hey said she and Outagamie County Executive Toby Paltzer made the joint statement endorsing the vitrification plan in support of Calumet County officials. The executives note they and their respective county boards oppose landfilling as the means of disposing of sediment containing the suspected cancer-causing contaminants. They said they share Gentz's concerns about the pending arrival of dredgings from Little Lake Butte des Morts in a private landfill near Chilton.

Each of the three respective county boards have passed resolutions urging the state to neutralize **PCB**-laden sediment via a vitrification plan promoted by Minergy Corp., a Neenah-based affiliate of Wisconsin Energy Corp. The county leaders say data prepared by Minergy officials refute DNR studies that show it as a much more expensive disposal method than storing the dredgings in specially designed landfills.

Hill said nothing has changed since the state vowed in spring to evaluate the new technology's costs and effectiveness as a disposal method. However, he said the disposal method for the cleanup of Little Lake Butte des Morts has already been determined by the paper makers funding the roughly \$60 million first phase of the river cleanup.

Seven paper companies have been held responsible for the discharge of PCBs into the Fox River from 1957 to 1971 during the manufacture and recycling of carbonless paper. The manmade chemicals have been linked to an increase in cancer risk in people and to deformities in wild animals.

Hill noted taxpayers are not subsidizing the cleanup, as the county executives maintained in a press release issued Thursday.

"It's all paper mill money that's the bottom line," he said

Paltzer, citing a report by Robert Paulson, Minergy's manager of business development, asserts the DNR exaggerated preliminary estimates for the vitrification plan. It did so partly by estimating disposal costs on a three-year time frame, when its own reports estimated the project would take twice as long, the report said.

Hill notes the papermakers responsible for funding the lake cleanup, known collectively as GW Partners, could have opted for the vitrification disposal method if they thought it was in their best interests.

Kris Naidl, a publicist representing the Little Lake Cleanup Team, which includes GW Partners and its contractors, said the companies estimate the proposed change in the disposal plan will double the duration of the project, extending it to about 2018.

Bruce Baker, river cleanup project director for the DNR, said the county leaders should not try to pressure companies to absorb

additional costs.

He and Hill refuted reports from Winnebago County officials suggesting contamination from **PCB**-laden sediment deposited at the Winnebago County Landfill in 1999 poses a potential threat to human health.

"Science tells me that PCBs leaching from sediment placed in a landfill is not a concern because they attach themselves to the soil particles," Hill said. "PCBs have not leached into the groundwater at any landfill site in the state of Wisconsin."

Winnebago County Solid Waste Management Director Len Leverage said small amounts of PCBs, once used in many disposable products, are present in all landfills in the state.

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