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Earle waiting for E

Agency not ready to discuss tests of hazardous sites

By Liz Sheehan

COLTS NECK — Results from test wells on hazardous material sites at Naval Weapons Station Earle have been forwarded to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, but no instructions concerning the sites have been received from the agency, a Navy official said.

In 1984, Earle was among the 10 toxic sites in the state added to the EPA's national priority list.

Lt. Commander Jeff Tubello said that wells had been placed near 11 sites on the base to monitor the ground water, and the data from the wells was given to the EPA and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The Navy wanted to find out from the EPA if more wells should be drilled, perhaps at different locations, Tubello said, as well as what the tests results mean.

"Did you see anything that startled you?" is one of the questions that the Navy wants to ask the EPA about the test results, he said.

A meeting to discuss the test results was scheduled for last August, he said.

"The state came, but the EPA didn't," he said.

Another meeting, scheduled for October, was canceled by the EPA, Tubello said.

"We're not ready yet, but we're getting there," the EPA stated, according to Tubello.

The Navy wants to discuss the test findings to get guidance on how to proceed to the next step in dealing with the sites, he said.

The meetings were canceled because they were "premature," Richard Cahill of the EPA press office in New York said Thursday.

"The 11 wells really didn't tell us a lot," he said.

They were designed to "get a sense of the hydrogeology" of the area, he said, and are "very preliminary."

The little information available about the depth and flow of underground water in the area must be obtained before further testing is done, Cahill said.

A meeting will be held with officials from the DEP and the Department of Defense, Cahill said, to discuss how the investigation — including the number, depth and location of test wells — will be continued.

New testing should begin in the spring, and extend through the summer, he said.

In an October report on hazardous waste sites in the state, the DEP said that the wastes generated from Earle include ordnance materials, grit and paint, paint solvents, paint sludges, ammonium picrate, lead bullets, zinc, lead and titanium.

"There are 29 suspected contaminated areas of various sizes at the main base," the report said.

"The soil at this site is extremely permeable, allowing for rapid migration to several aquifers...," according to the report.

The cleanup is being financed by a special fund set up by Congress to clean up hazardous waste sites on military installations.

The explanation for the delay, Tubello said, might be that the Earle sites were not a "major problem," and had "low priority."

The state's October report said that a stream at Earle which empties into the Manasquan River showed elevated levels of chlorobenzene (ppb) when tested in May 1987.

The report said that the stream, Minga-mahone Brook, was retested in August, "from the origin of the stream to its confluence with the Manasquan River in an effort to ascertain the source of contamination."

Cahill said the Navy permitted the DEP to test the stream because it was involved in the Manasquan River Reservoir project.

When the stream was retested, it showed no traces of the material that appeared in the first test, he said, and the state said it saw no need of further surface or sediment sampling.

The levels of ppb in the stream found in the first test, "hypothetically could be cause for concern," but the new test result showed that the "stream is clean," said James Schmeltzer of the DEP.

Benzene, which is contained in ppb, is a carcinogen, he said.

It is unusual to find the levels, 86 per billion, in a stream, said Schmeltzer.

The substance could have come from automobiles, road runoff or gasoline, he said.