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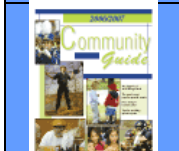
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EPA: High school not a superfund site

Web listing to last forever despite lack of major contaminants

BY JENNIFER KOHLHEPP

Staff Writer

Web listing to last forever despite lack of major contaminants

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CHRIS KELLY staff The fenced and covered area, which is part of the North Brunswick Township High School's expansion, tested positive in July for levels of arsenic, lead, copper and zinc in excess of those allowed by the Department of Environmental Protection.

NORTH BRUNSWICK — The township's high school is not a Superfund site, according to federal officials.

"There is no federal Superfund interest in the site," Environmental Protection Agency site assessment manager Kristin Dobinson said Tuesday.

Republican candidate for state Assembly in the 17th District Scott Johnkins alleged that EPA considers the North Brunswick Township High School a Superfund site because there is a listing as an "archived site" on the agency's Web site.

The EPA lists the high school site and seven other properties in town, including areas on Route 1, Nassau Street and Jersey Avenue, on their archives as sites considered at one time for possible remediation.

In November 1985, the EPA cleared the property for the construction of the high school and closed its file, according to its Web site.

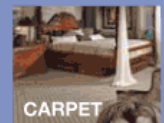
"Although there is a reference on the EPA Web site in the archives, there was never a Superfund designation for the high school," township business administrator Robert Lombard said.

Lombard said the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection air tested the site in 1985 based upon the complaint of a resident.

Dobinson said that the DEP gave its report to the EPA "as a courtesy."



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"We reviewed the report and the site did not qualify for the National Priorities List. They really didn't find anything," Dobinson said.

According to Dobinson, the tests showed some low levels of methylene chloride, chloroform and toluene.

"They are common lab contaminants," Dobinson said, adding that they could have turned up in the lab during the testing.

Dobinson said that once a site is reported, it can end up in one of three categories.

The first category is the National Priority List which gives the site Superfund status, and allows for federal money to clean it up.

The second category is for "active" sites that are being cleaned up by the states but may still end up on the NPL if the situation warrants.

The final category is for those sites that do not meet the criteria for the other two.

Dobinson said that once a site is archived, even if it tests totally normal, it will remain in the archive forever.

"There is no way to make it disappear," Dobinson said.

Although she said that she is not trained as a health professional, she believes that the site is not hazardous.

"I don't think it would be hazardous to a person at the site," Dobinson said.

She also said that the EPA is not watching the site.

"That is why we did not require any further remedial action plan," Dobinson said.

Schools Superintendent Robert Rimmer said Johnkins should have garnered all of the facts prior to releasing a statement that alleged the health and safety of students and community members were at risk.

"It is irresponsible to comment on the contamination, causing concern for residents, in particular for someone who is running for office," Rimmer said.

Rimmer reiterated that the board has presented the public with all of the facts since the start of the investigation into the property.

"We have employed experts to our staff who continue to tell us there is no cause for concern at all," Rimmer said.

Sites deleted from the National Priorities list to the archives remain eligible for further Superfund-financed remedial action in the event that future conditions warrant, according to Johnkins.

"Federal funding may be possible, and positive, proactive management from all sides to clean up this site is what is needed right now," Johnkins said.

While Board of Education president Fred Manning said he agrees with Johnkins' concern for safety, he feels that several allegations are false.

"It is not a Superfund site. It did not test positive before the construction of the high school, and we are looking for funding beyond taxpayer money," Manning said.

Manning said that the board is doing all it can to take care of the situation.

"We've done all the things we can do to alert the public to this issue," Manning said.

The section chief of the EPA's New York office, Melvin Hauptmann, said, "This site is not eligible for federal remediation action or federal funding, unless it is placed on the EPA's National Priorities List."

Hauptmann also said that the site will remain on the EPA archives indefinitely.

Although the EPA allowed the construction of the high school on the property, new soil tests taken in July

by environmental engineering firm Powell-Harpstead in the reconstruction area at the north end of the high school revealed levels of arsenic, lead, copper and zinc in excess of those permitted by the DEP.

According to the DEP, the heavy metals are not a danger to residents unless ingested.

The school district closed off the contaminated area and retained Powell-Harpstead to complete a more thorough battery of tests in the area.

Additional tests on surrounding township property concluded one out of 17 soil samples taken at Veterans Park for the township on Aug. 4 contained 37.5 parts per million of arsenic, according to Lombard.

Twenty parts per million is the maximum acceptable level, according to the DEP.

The soil sampling comes as a result of Tak Construction of Clark excavating less than an acre of 4-foot-deep contaminated surface fill with a higher than expected percentage of glass during the initial phase of the \$29 million renovation project to the high school that took place in June.

The DEP should approve the testing plan submitted by Powell-Harpstead on behalf of the township for the Veterans Park and high school site within the week, according Lombard.

"Once we receive the approval for full comprehensive testing, we will have a 60- to 90-day timeline to complete the battery of tests and to analyze the results," Lombard said.

Lombard said the remedial process, which includes the removal of contaminated soil, will not begin until sometime next year.

"We don't want to let go of our timeline yet, and we hope to continue with the renovation to the high school as soon as possible," Lombard said.