

Lone Tree Council and TRW

Dioxin Update #121

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Lone Tree Council

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(Fighting for environmental justice since 1978)

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DECISION ON SLURRY PIT COULD THREATEN MAJOR GREAT LAKES WATERSHED

Lt. Governor Cherry's slurry pit decision in conflict with MDEQ technical staff and CDC

Today Lieutenant Governor John Cherry intervened in a regulatory process, overriding regulations and the advice of his department, the MDEQ, to allow the continued construction of a slurry pit to house dioxin-laden sediments, without providing for adequate controls.

The decision comes on the heels of a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) announcement yesterday that it intends to investigate the impact of toxic chemicals like dioxin on the health of people living in the Saginaw Bay watershed and other Great Lakes' regions. A preliminary report from the CDC found that health could be at risk. (see link below)

The Lt. Governor's intervention comes after a three-year process of review and construction in which the MDEQ carefully evaluated the facility and made the case for a slurry wall (a protective barrier to prevent dioxin-laden waste from entering the environment) and a groundwater permit in order to improve the facility and protect the resources of the state. The facility will house highly contaminated dioxin-laden sediments as a result of Dow Chemical Company's operations over the last century. Two weeks ago the director of the MDEQ, Stephen Chester, was resolved to require both the slurry wall and groundwater permit before the site operated. Then the Lt. Governor was asked to become involved.

"This is clearly and wrongly political intervention at its worse in the regulatory process," said Lone Tree Council's Michelle Hurd Riddick. "Why do we have regulations, permits, laws, and research if elected officials can just step in for political expediency. " How does this ailing Saginaw Bay Watershed, recover when such foolish and irresponsible decisions continue to made".

Instead of heeding the advice of his own DEQ's research documenting the need for a slurry wall, the Lt. Governor chose to rely on a study paid by for by the Dow Chemical Company and done by a Dow contractor without peer-review, DEQ, or public comment. It is the position of residents and environmentalists that Dow will insist they be held to no more stringent standards should they construct a site on the Tittabawassee River. The precedent is huge.

It was also decided that ground water permits would not be needed, despite concerns by DEQ staff that the unlined structure could potentially threaten groundwater and the wells of residents dependent upon them.

Also, the threshold for dioxin to place in the site is 1 million ppt, that is more than 100,000 times higher than the state's standard for what is allowed in residential areas in Michigan.

“These are bad decisions that set a worse precedent,” said Rita Jack of the Sierra Club. “We could see these unlined, un-permitted, hole-in-the-ground-solutions threatening our water throughout the Great Lakes – that is unacceptable.”

The facility is strongly opposed by area residents and environmentalists as risky and ill planned. Located in a floodplain, on productive farmland, adjacent to the river and the Crow Island State Game Area, and next to the yards of residents of Frankenlust and Zilwaukee Townships, the facility still does not have an operation and management plan. Environmentalists have urged the Governor's office and area officials to pursue other locations and options that do not threaten the largest watershed in Michigan.

Despite the controversy surrounding the facility, and letters from the Zilwaukee Township clerk, Frankenlust Township supervisor, and Dr. Neil Varner, Medical Director of Saginaw County Department of Health, requesting a transparent and open discussion, decisions were limited to the Army Corps of Engineers, DEQ, and Lt. Governor. The Lt. Governor all but ignored a request to meet with twp officials where the site is located.

“The Lt. Governor has known from the outset that this was a highly controversial facility,” said Pat Bradt, Zilwaukee Township clerk. “He could have shown leadership by pursuing real alternatives that don't jeopardize the health of residents or the watershed. Instead he is pursuing a disastrous plan that will continue to haunt this community for decades.”

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/grtlakes/>