

Re-assess

Excavation fails to find Nemo area contamination source

By SCOTT RANDOLPH
Staff Writer

Attempts to excavate old dump sites in Nemo to find the source of contamination effecting water wells has been called off after those attempts failed.

"What happened is we dug in all the spots indicated as potential sites," said United States Forest Service (USFS) spokesperson Joe Colwell. "We didn't find anything at all."

"It was a case of we hit everything we thought we needed to hit and we didn't find anything at all," he said. "The weather is getting pretty bad and there is kind of a safety hazard for the crews who are doing the digging."

"With all that in combination we decided to step back and re-assess," said Colwell.

EnviroSearch, the private contractor hired by the USFS to help find and clean-up the spill of Ethylene Dibromide (EDB) left by USFS crews in the mid-1970's will still be working in the area, said Colwell.

"They are going to be working on a permanent solution to the water needs of residents," he said. "They will also be doing some geological and hydrological testing to get a better feel for what is underground."

He said there was a possibility EnviroSearch would be drilling test wells in the effected area around Nemo.

(Cont. on Page 3A)

Cover Story

Nemo contamination

(Cont. from Page 1A)

Further problems in delaying discovery of the source of the EDB until Spring when additional water will enter the groundwater, possibly spreading the contamination further, is something Colwell said he, "hasn't heard any mention of as a concern."

"This has been out there for twenty years, it is not like something just happened," he said. "The feeling is we need to act and act as soon as we can but there is no sense that we have to do something in the next couple of months because we don't know what is out there."

Back on the subject of the possibility of drilling test wells, Colwell said this was important to determine the extent of the

contamination and its possible spread in the Nemo area.

"We need to identify the underground plume," he said. "We are not sure of the extent of it yet."

"We have to monitor to figure out how fast it is spreading," he said. "We don't know if wells have been contaminated for one year or ten years and we don't know if it is spreading one inch a year or a thousand feet a year."

On the bright side, Colwell said the temporary water tanks with supply lines to serve all residents with contaminated wells was complete.

"All we have to finish is the enclosure of the tanks so they won't freeze," said Colwell. "Everyone can get through the winter."

He said the "next couple of weeks," would be used by EnviroSearch to look at "solutions for the long term."

This could include, he said, "a community well, redrilling everyone's existing well, installing filters on residential water systems; we have several ways to go and we have not made that decision."

"We are looking at how to tackle the next phase because in the first phase we didn't get what we thought we would get," he said.

The results of testing, on request from area residents, 20 to 30 additional wells in the area has not returned from the lab, he said.

He said he expects this information to become available either later today or on Monday.

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