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Cleanup starts at Starmet

By Maureen O'Connell

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The Board of Selectmen heard about progress made in the cleanup of the Starmet/Nuclear Metals Superfund site Monday night.

Pam Rockwell of the 2229 Main St. Committee outlined the testing and removal procedures completed by environmental consultants de maximis, inc. just before Christmas. Rockwell said the committee was able to use funds allocated by Town Meeting in 2002 to hire a consultant to examine the Environmental Protection Agency's Plan for cleanup.

"An important part of the cleanup is knowing what and where has to be cleaned up," said Rockwell, adding the consultant will also determine where pollutants removed from the ground will be taken next.

In December, de maximis, inc. removed approximately 50 55-gallon drums from one area of the site. The drums have been buried since 1968. The area where the drums were found is one of 17 areas on the Starmet property that will be tested and examined by de maximis.

During the removal, Rockwell said monitors were used to control radiation and/or dust from getting into the air. Rockwell said the crew was successful, in that no measurable radiation was found in the air during the process.

Other than drums, Rockwell said excavators found pieces of old laboratory equipment.

"There was one area that looked like it came right off a lab bench," she said. "It looked like someone just dumped it in the ground."

The metal drums were rusted and deteriorating to the point where not one drum was removed intact, Rockwell said. The drums and material around them have been stored in safe containers located on the site.

The 2229 Committee has turned its focus now to a landfill area on the site. It is uncertain what is buried there.

"That will be a big focus of the committee as the data comes in," said Rockwell.

Another matter of concern are the buildings on site. Rockwell said approximately 3,000 drums of material is currently stored there. The Department of Environmental Protection has a bid out for a contractor to haul the drums away.


Rockwell said the 2229 Committee is pleased the first steps have been taken, and looks forward to a completely cleaned up site.


"We want this site cleaned up," said Rockwell. "This needs to be cleaned up to the point where people can safely live there and we're pushing the EPA to do so."

Jim West, the technical coordinator for Citizens Research and Environmental Watch, or CREW, said the EPA's cleanup efforts are moving "in the right direction."

West said CREW has honed in on the involvement of the community in the cleanup process.

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"The EPA has no responsibility to release the information to the public until the cleanup is complete," said West. He said CREW will continue to push the EPA to keep residents informed.

"CREW convinced the EPA to give early access to this study," said Rockwell. "Ordinarily, we wouldn't have been aware of all this work."

Selectman Peggy Briggs thanked Rockwell and West for their presentations.

"It seems like things are starting to happen," she said.