

Uranium cleanup moves ahead

By Davis Bushnell, Globe Correspondent | January 1, 2006

Substantial progress has been made in the last three months removing depleted uranium metal rods and barrels of depleted uranium from the Starmet Corp. Superfund site in West Concord, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The status of the cleanup will be reviewed by a group of Concord residents and officials at a meeting Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at 141 Keyes Road. The 2229 Main Street Oversight Committee, which takes its name from the Starmet address, regularly reviews the status of the cleanup work on the the 46-acre property off Route 62.

By Dec. 23, a subcontractor of Envirocare of Utah Inc. had carted away 2,540 of the 3,650 drums of depleted uranium and 100 of the 317 tons of depleted uranium metal, said Joseph Ferson, a spokesman for the Department of Environmental Protection, which is overseeing this part of the cleanup. All of the material is being trucked to Utah for disposal.

Envirocare, which is working under a \$8 million contract awarded by the Department of Environmental Protection in August, "is slightly ahead of schedule and is expected to complete its work in March or April" of this year, Ferson said.

The US Army has agreed to pick up the tab for this work. From 1970 to 1999, Starmet's predecessor, Nuclear Metals Inc., made uranium-tipped bullets for the Army.

A leader of a Concord activist group, James West, said he and others are pleased that the process is moving ahead efficiently. "It's gratifying to see those trucks pulling out of the Starmet property every day." West is technical assistance coordinator for the Citizens Research and Environmental Watch, which received a \$50,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

The Starmet site was placed on the EPA's Superfund list, which designates the nation's most contaminated properties, in 2001.

After the Utah firm has removed all of the low-level radioactive material from Starmet buildings, which are guarded around the clock, another contractor, De Maximis Inc. of Windsor, Conn., will examine what remains in those buildings.

De Maximis will be evaluating air, soil, and ground water data on behalf of the Army and four other parties cited by the EPA in 2003 for contaminating the Starmet site. The others are the US Department of Energy; Whittaker Corp. of Simi Valley, Calif.; Textron Inc. of Providence; and MONY Life Insurance Co. of New York City.

While the Army is paying for the current phase, the cost of the overall cleanup will be apportioned among the five parties. The split has not been determined.