

CONCORD

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Superfund site cleanup likely to begin this year

Depleted uranium barrels to be moved

By Davis Bushnell, Globe Correspondent | March 6, 2005

One of the major fronts in the cleanup of the Starmet Corp. Superfund site in West Concord -- the removal of more than 3,700 barrels of depleted uranium -- is expected to get underway by year's end, according to environmental officials.

Last Wednesday was the deadline for bids to be submitted to the state Department of Environmental Protection for this work, which could take a year or more to complete. The contractor is expected to be selected March 22 or 23, said Ed Coletta, a department spokesman.

In late spring, Coletta said, the contractor will begin evaluating and inventorying the barrels, which contain small amounts of radioactive material. They are being stored in Starmet buildings on the 46-acre property off Route 62.

The US Army, one of five parties cited by the US Environmental Protection Agency in 2003 for contaminating the site, has agreed to pay for the disposal of the barrels. Starmet's predecessor company, Nuclear Metals Inc., made uranium-tipped bullets for the Army from 1970 to 1999.

An investigation of how to clean up the property is continuing, directed by De Maximis Inc. of Weatogue, Conn., which is conducting its research for the Army and the other culpable parties.

Next Wednesday, Bruce Thompson, De Maximis project director, will give highlights of his firm's work so far to two Concord groups, Citizens Research and Environmental Watch and the 2229 Main St. Committee. (The Starmet property is located at 2229 Main St.)

James West of Concord, a technical assistance coordinator for Citizens Research and Environmental Watch, said De Maximis has been studying all the appropriate site data, but "the issue will be what they've found."

The citizens research group has a \$50,000 technical assistance grant from the EPA, which is holding the Wednesday meeting at Concord town offices. The meeting will not be open to the public.

Most of the samples taken late last year of metal debris and remnants of some 60 underground drums have now been analyzed by General Engineering Laboratory of Charleston, S.C., Thompson said in a telephone interview last week.

"We'll present the latest interpretations of those analyses" at this week's meeting, Thompson said, declining to give details before the meeting. "We'll also discuss potential contaminants other than uranium," he added.

Thompson reiterated that monitors installed around the property's perimeter are indicating that no contaminants have been released into the air.

Next month, he said, groundwater sampling will be done around the 99 monitoring wells, and near 3 to 4 acres of bogs and a cooling-water pond. A second round of sampling will be conducted six months later, he said.

An assessment of risks to human health posed by the site could begin later this year, following the final water sampling, Thompson said.

Besides the Army, the other responsible parties 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.

The Starmet site went on the EPA's Superfund list in June 2001. The list designates severely contaminated sites, which are being cleaned up under federal supervision. ■

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