

Starmet Corp. site cleanup progress lauded by environmentalists

By Davis Bushnell, Boston Globe | March 9, 2006

A milestone in the cleanup of Starmet Corp.'s Superfund site in West Concord was reached with the recent removal of 3,846 drums of depleted uranium and 322 tons of depleted uranium metal, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

This work was completed on Feb. 27, a month or two ahead of schedule, by a subcontractor of Envirocare of Utah Inc., department spokesman Joseph Ferson said. He added that the cost of removing and trucking the material to Utah for disposal "is a little more than \$8 million."

Ferson added that more than \$1 million will be spent on removing "other contaminated waste and chemicals" from the site. A timetable for this phase to be completed is now being worked out with the Utah firm, he said.

The Army has agreed to pay for these cleanup efforts. From 1970 to 1999, Starmet's predecessor company, Nuclear Metals Inc., produced uranium-tipped bullets for the Army.

Local environmentalists and officials said they are pleasantly surprised by the progress.

"We're pleased that this part of the cleanup work has been done so quickly and safely," said Pam Rockwell, chairwoman of the 2229 Main Street Oversight Committee, made up of town officials and residents. The Starmet property is located at 2229 Main St.

In a next key step, the Connecticut firm doing a remedial investigation of the 46-acre property will examine what remains in the Starmet buildings where the barrels of low-level radioactive material were stored.

"We're prepared to inventory what's left [in the buildings] and then estimate the cost of removing what's necessary, including possibly manufacturing equipment," said Bruce Thompson, project manager for de maximis inc. of Windsor, Conn. The firm is evaluating air, soil, and ground-water data on behalf of the Army and four other parties cited by the US Environmental Protection Agency in 2003 for contaminating the Starmet site. It was placed on the agency's list of the nation's most polluted sites in 2001.

The buildings must be vacated before his company's workers can get into them, Thompson said, but a Starmet spinoff, Advanced Specialty Metals, is currently using the buildings.

There are indications, he said, that the buildings will be vacant by the end of this year.

Officials of Advanced Specialty Metals and an EPA spokeswoman could not be reached for comment.

State and federal environmental officials have said they hope a final cleanup plan for the property off Route 62 can be unveiled in 2009.