EPA wants Omaha plant to incinerate sludge, soil

Proposal not final and is most expensive of 9 options

By Cary Bradburn 7.17
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The federal Environmental Protection Agency has proposed that sludge and soil contaminated by pentachlorophenol, or PCP, at the old Arkwood Inc. plant near Omaha (Boone County) be incinerated on-site.

However, Roger Meacham, an EPA spokesman in Dallas, said Monday the agency has not made a final determination and will consider other alternatives during a public comment period that closes Aug. 15.

The on-site incineration would cost $18 million, including one year to build the facility and two years to burn the material, Meacham said.

It is the most expensive alternative of nine studied by a consultant for the past two years, according to the EPA's proposed plan of action.

Allan Gates of Little Rock, an attorney for Mass Merchandisers Inc. of Harrison, which owns the plant, said the company has recommended off-site incineration of the sludge and consolidation and capping of the soil.

That remedy would cost about $4.1 million.

Arkwood, a wood treatment facility, closed in 1984 and last year was added to the EPA's list of hazardous waste dumps that pose long-term health and environmental threats.

Bob Barker, a company spokesman, said about 20,400 cubic feet of contaminated material is on the plant site.

A sample taken in 1987 showed low amounts of PCPs in nearby Cricket Springs, but no contamination of other creeks in the area, the EPA has said.

Meacham said EPA supported on-site incineration because it would destroy the contaminated material and has a low possibility of failure.

"Simply because we prefer this remedy at this time doesn't mean that's our choice because things may change in the public comment period," Meacham added.

He said a final decision on the cleanup would be made after Aug. 15.

Gates said Mass Merchandisers didn't believe that on-site incineration was warranted when measured against other potential remedial actions.

Among the other alternatives considered in the consultants' report were:

- Take no action with some monitoring at a cost of $290,000.
- Monitor the site and restrict access at a cost of $400,000.
- Incinerate only the sludge for $2.1 million.
- Incinerate the sludge and cap the site with top soil for $3.1 million.
- Incinerate the sludge, sieve and wash the soil, biologically treat sand and fines and cap affected soils for $14 million.
- Incinerate the sludge and place soil in a landfill.
- Incinerate the sludge and consolidate, sieve and wash and cap the affected soil for $8.6 million.

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