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Residents unhappy with contamination answers

By TOWANDA UNDERDUE

Assertions that the contaminated Westinghouse tract in Bloomfield poses no health hazard were rejected last night by homeowners who complained of cancer, brain tumors and other maladies.

The residents complained of high cancer rates in the vicinity of Arlington Avenue in addressing the board of health.

They prompted 3d Ward Councilman Gary Iacobacci and 1st Ward Councilman E. Henry Tuorto to recommend that Bloomfield hire an independent consultant to determine the level and extent of contamination at the 14.2-acre tract where uranium was used during World War II.

The councilmen said they will suggest a $10,000 consulting fee.

"We're not the village idiots sitting out here," said Joanne Lucarelli, after officials could not answer all of the residents' questions.

"Everything you said in this room tonight was one big guess," she added. "You wanted to pacify the public, but we will not be pacified anymore."

Homeowners voiced concerns about mercury, uranium and thorium after hearing speeches by B.M. Bowman, special projects director for Westinghouse; Mark Roberts, senior health physicist for the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC); and Steven Meyers of the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

The officials said it is safe to walk through most buildings, but some potentially harmful substances are embedded in pipes, concrete and soil.

They said Westinghouse is working with Police Chief Jack McNiff to increase security and keep vandals off the tract.

Bowman said Westinghouse has been cleaning up the property where mercury vapor lamps, light bulbs and fluorescent tubes were produced. He said the cleanup is "90 percent complete" and is being supervised by the DEP and NRC.

The west side of Arlington Avenue has been remediated and equipment in the buildings has been decontaminated, Bowman said.

He added that three buildings have been demolished and the remaining seven should be torn down within three years.

Westinghouse is doing radiological cleanup in two buildings plus soil and groundwater treatments, he said.

So far, the company has spent $20 million on cleanup and has received no federal Community Development Block Grants to Bloomfield, despite the idea being discussed a year ago, Bowman said.

His remarks did not appease residents. Many became agitated when Bowman could not answer how far the contaminants had spread, how many health-related lawsuits were filed by former Westinghouse employees and if any residues were dumped into sewers.

Not accurate. I was [illegible] of [illegible]