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State of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

Northeast District Office

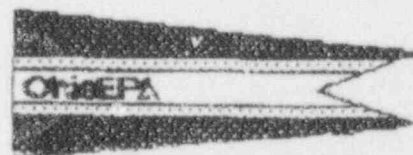
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FAX-Transmittal Sheet

To: Tony Huffert, NRC
Mail Stop 5E2FAX Number: 301 504 2260Subject: Best Air Dump & Sewer District
Cleanup - news articlesFrom: Kathy Jones • NEDODate: Jan 14, 1993Pages to follow: 4
(Include Cover Sheet)If you have any questions, call
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Updates...

Lights, Camera, Action: Documentary on Bert Avenue

By Chris Trepal

"Bert Ave.", a T.V. documentary, examines how illegal radioactive waste contamination occurred in the city of Newburgh Heights, Ohio, the effect on the people in the neighborhood, and what is being done to clean it up. Michael Matis, a producer from Cox Cable Cleveland, premiered his hour-long documentary to a select audience of neighbors and members of The Earth Day Coalition on October 28. "This is one of the first times that a cable company has done a documentary of this type," he said.

Matis is a writer, television producer, and musician with an interest in environmental issues. In addition to producing this documentary, Matis also wrote the original background music. Matis learned about Bert Avenue from a radio announcement of a community meeting. He attended the meeting and was "shocked at the distress of the people" and was disturbed by the explanations from the federal U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). He decided to do "a five minute piece" to bring light to the issues and to help get people interested.

A year later, after shooting more than 30 tapes, countless interviews and additional research, "Bert Ave." was born. "This is the hardest project I have ever done. I tried to learn about the issues facing the people of Bert Avenue and tell their complex story in one hour with my paint brush...When you listen to the 'suits' talk you think they have all the answers. But when you listen to the people you understand where the truth lies," said Matis.

Producing "Bert Ave.", has changed his life. Matis has started recycling, making lifestyle changes, and is becoming "passionate" about the environment. "I want to help people wake up to what is happening," he said. "Issues come down to individuals. People need to be aware and make an effort. It's morally and ethically important."

"Bert Ave." was aired on Cox Cable each Wednesday in November to over 50,000 viewers. It will be broadcast on other cable systems which will enable over 300,000 viewers to take a unique look at the Bert Avenue site. Check Cablevision, North Coast Cable, Continental Cable and Lakeland Community College Cable for your local broadcast time and channel.

The Earth Day Coalition has a copy of "Bert Ave." available for viewing and/or borrowing. Contact the office at 281-6468 for more information.

The Earth Day Coalition has been working on the Bert Avenue site for past three years. Below is a summary of some of our activities:

- Researching, document searches, interviews, attending quarterly regulators meetings and community meetings. Bert Avenue went from a neglected contaminated site to a Priority A Site to be given special attention by the U.S. NRC.

- Assembling and Acting as a document repository for all documents on the Bert Avenue site. These files have been used by scores of neighbors,

- students, attorneys, and members of the media to obtain information on this site.

- Obtaining technical assistance from radiological and chemical experts. Offering technical assistance in community organizing and media outreach.

- Advocating for a fence around the site so neighborhood children will not use the abandoned dump as a playground.

- Petitioning the Center for Disease Control (Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry) to do a health assessment of the people who live near Bert Avenue.

- Petitioning elected officials to initiate a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) audit of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's actions and failures to act over the past decade at Bert Avenue. The GAO audit will be completed this month.

Radioactive Waste Compact Meeting Update

The Midwest Compact held a meeting on November 10, 1992 in Des Moines, Iowa which was attended by Earth Day Coalition Co-Director, Chris Trepal. On the agenda was a request for over \$97,000 in funding from Ohio to pay for a "Blue Ribbon" Committee that is charged with establishing siting criteria for the proposed radioactive waste dump somewhere in our state. This 13 person committee has at least 8 members with direct ties to the nuclear waste generation industry. This committee also has a March 31 deadline for completion of its work. Other compact states, like New York, have struggled to meet an 18 month or longer time limit for recommending siting criteria.

Another committee reporting to the governor (that has met only once a year and has lost key members Edith Chase, former Senator Eric Fingerhut, and former Representative Joe Secrest) is charged with looking at complex issues of licensing, operations, long term maintenance, design technology, etc. for a radioactive waste dump in Ohio. This committee's current membership, timeline and complete mandate are not known at this time.

Reports from both of these committees will be used to create legislation which is needed to begin the search for a dump site in Ohio. Look for legislative action on this issue any time after January, 1993. But don't just sit on your hands while you wait! Now is the time to call your state Senator and Representative to communicate your concerns about this new proposed radioactive waste dump.

It is our opinion that no one has yet generated the necessary analyses of the economic and environmental impacts for Ohio taxpayers and ratepayers of all the options for radioactive waste disposal in or out of our state. Until this is done, Ohio should not comply with a flawed federal law. For more information on the proposed radioactive waste dump or a more complete update, please contact the office at 281-6468.

Welcome New Members!

Welcome to the newest members of The Earth Day Coalition. We are happy to have you join the work to build a safe, just and sustainable planet, starting here in Northeast Ohio: David Beach, John Brooking IV, Laurie Edwards, Gene F. Foley, Gregory Hurd, Pat Marida, Smith Mehta, Frank and Regie Routman.

Dump's tale no short story

By JOHN F. HAGAN
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

About a year ago, Mike Matis was at a gathering of Newburgh Heights residents who were meeting to express concerns about a radioactive waste dump on Bert Ave.

As a producer at Cox Cable Cleveland, he thought it would make an interesting five-minute story.

But something happened on his way to the short story. That five-minute idea turned into an hour-long documentary, "Bert Ave.," which airs this month and next month on local cable stations.

"I was really moved by the testimony of the people," Matis said of that first encounter with the Bert Ave. residents. "I turned what was going to be a five-minute story into a documentary that looks at the last 20 years."

Matis produced, wrote and edited the documentary and provided his own music for the program. WCLV-FM radio executive Robert Conrad narrates.

Residents interviewed talked of the frustration and fear of living next to a radioactive dump and the effects they believe it has had on their health and the health of their children.

"Do you people realize what you are putting us through?" one woman

asks company officials and representatives from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission at a public meeting.

As one lawyer representing residents says in the documentary: "It's an easy place to get angry about."

The 10-acre Bert Ave. dump has been undergoing cleanup for more than a decade. A cleanup is under way by Chemetron Corp., the company held responsible for illegally dumping low-level radioactive waste on the property. The company has been mapping "hot spots" on the property.

The site is contaminated with chemical and low-level radioactive waste, much of which is in huge mounds near residents' homes. Chemetron contaminated the industrial site in 1975, when it illegally deposited rubble tainted with depleted uranium. The rubble came from a building on Harvard Ave. that the chemical maker dismantled.

Company representatives and state and federal officials involved in the cleanup and monitoring of the site and politicians are interviewed in the story.

Matis said Cox Cable was hesitant at first to allow him to pursue the project. "As we got going, especially as the product was finished, they were so proud they stood behind it 100 percent," he said.

Matis, 29, started his television ca-

reer in high school when he took a television course and worked on his school's television station. In his senior year at Normandy High School, he got a job at Cox Cable. He's been there 12 years.

He has a degree from Cleveland State University, where he majored in communications. He attended CSU while working at the cable company. Matis produces and hosts a Cox Cable music show and has done entertainment features for Channel One, an educational program that is aired along with commercials in schools across the country.

He said the work on the documentary has been fulfilling. He's now become an avid environmentalist. "I started recycling at home," he said. "I'm very interested in the environment. I expound on it every time I get the chance."

"Sometimes I feel like I'm harping and being obnoxious. You can get really passionate about this because there's so much you see going wrong."

The documentary also taught him a lesson. "I learned that the safeguards that we assume are out there are not really there," he said. "They don't really exist."

Matis said viewers should check with their local cable companies to find out when the documentary will air in their communities.



PHOTO BY JAMES A. ROSS

Mike Matis, a producer for Cox Cable Cleveland, spent the last year working on an hour-long documentary on a radioactive waste dump in Newburgh Heights. The documentary will air this month and next month on local cable stations.

Sewer district plans cobalt cleanup

By DAVE DAVIS

PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

CUYAHOGA HEIGHTS

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District officials are undertaking a multimillion-dollar cleanup at their Southerly treatment plant despite continued assertions that radioactive contamination there poses no threat to anyone.

In August, Erwin Odeal, the district's executive director, escorted a group of reporters to the edge of Southerly's three on-site evaporation ponds. In a news conference there,

he criticized Plain Dealer stories on Cobalt-60 contamination in the ponds as "highly inflammatory and extremely misleading." Odeal said then that no cleanup was necessary. The contamination was so slight, and the areas affected so remote, a fence wasn't even called for, he said.

But four weeks later, district officials, in an emergency action, approved \$119,955 to immediately fence two large areas of contamination at the 217-acre plant, the district's largest treatment facility. Yesterday, they acknowledged they had been working on a cleanup plan for weeks.

Odeal did not return calls made to his office yesterday.

But Assistant General Counsel Tom Lenhart reiterated the contention that the contamination was minimal and posed no threat to the public or workers.

"What's changed? Nothing really," Lenhart said.

"Just to be ultraconservative and make sure everybody is safe, we put up a fence," he said. "To restrict access is a good idea."

Recalling the August news conference, Lenhart said Odeal was probably making a distinction between a cleanup that actually needed to be done to protect public safety and one that might be done simply to satisfy the demands of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the federal agency responsible for protecting the public from radioactive materials.

Sewer district officials believe that the actions they are being forced to take by the NRC are not really needed for public safety.

In a plan submitted to the NRC, district officials said they would leave contaminated ash in a north fill

area alone and allow the radioactive cobalt to decay to a safe level. (Cobalt-60 loses half of its radioactivity every 5.2 years.) District officials will excavate three contaminated ash ponds that sit south of the plant along I-77 on the banks of the Cuyahoga River.

Then they will store the contaminated waste, estimated to be at least 200,000 cubic yards, in a nearby ash landfill while a final resolution is discussed.

Work is scheduled to begin April 1.

While the exact cleanup cost is not known, officials at the NRC and district concede that it will be millions of dollars. Lenhart said that could jump to billions if the district was forced to dispose of the waste off-site at a low-level radioactive-waste dump in Barnwell, S.C., the only dump open to Ohio.

NRC officials privately conceded that the NRC was at least partially to blame for the contamination at Southerly and that the sewer district and its customers were the victims.

They said this because there are only two possible scenarios that can account for the contamination at Southerly. Both involve shortcomings at the NRC, officials said.

The first is that an NRC license holder dumped too much radioactive cobalt into the district's sewer system. The sewer district has no jurisdiction over such discharges, which are legal in small quantities. The NRC is charged with monitoring them, but years often pass before the agency checks license holders' records.

The second possibility centers on the theory that small quantities of cobalt might have legally been dumped into the sewer system by a number of businesses, then "reconcentrated" in the sewage treatment process, taking an amount of cobalt that was of no significance to federal regulators and turning it into a multimillion-dollar headache for the district.

Cleveland Plain Dealer
Jan 14, 1993