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News

Mercury level in groundwater five times limit

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An Escambia County doctor told the Conecuh County Commission Monday morning that as recently as 2002 the level of mercury in the groundwater around the Timberlands landfill was five times the EPA limit.

Dr. Salem Saloom, who said he owns property in the Conecuh County, said representatives from Conecuh Woods claim there have been no problems from the Timberlands facility, when documents reflect there has been a substantial mercury leak within the past 10 years.

"We all know that mercury is a heavy metal, is unsafe and stays around for a long, long time," he said. "The levels in the test wells has been equal to or above the safe drinking water limit for years."

Saloom said in November of 2000 the facility was placed on an "assessment monitoring program" and by January 2002 three new groundwater monitoring wells had been installed.

After that, he said, 27 new gas extraction wells and a flare station were installed as part of corrective measures.

"In another corrective measures report of September of 2004," he said, "Timberlands notes that additional gas wells have been installed, so that the new total is now 38 wells."

Saloom said to his knowledge there has been no study about the effectiveness of burning mercury into the atmosphere.

"I'm not sure what health risks are associated with burning mercury into the atmosphere or if it even works," he said.

Saloom said the reports about the problems were never released or made public.

"We have nothing in the ADEM records saying that anyone was notified about these high levels of mercury," he said. "Since the northern boundary of Timberlands in the Conecuh County line, wouldn't it be a good thing to let the Conecuh County Commission know of these problems?"

Saloom also responded to the statement that the Timberlands facility, which is less than 10 miles from the proposed site of the Conecuh Woods landfill, only has 10 years left before it is full.

"Escambia County officials met with Timberlands earlier this year and got an estimate that 19 years remain," he said. "There is also the possibility to expand beyond Timberland's current 134 acres. We do not need another landfill."

Saloom told the commissioners that a company specializing in repairing landfill liners reported that 82 percent of landfill liners nationwide leak and that a majority of the holes in the liners are larger than one foot in diameter.

After Saloom spoke, Citizens for a Clean Southwest Alabama (CCSA) Chairman Johnny Andrews asked Conecuh Woods President Jimmy Stone to leave.

"Our commissioners can't ask you to leave," Andrews said, "but we can. We want to work with the commission to move this county forward, but this is stopping us."

Stone replied, "I didn't know we were stopping you."

After the meeting, Bermuda resident Larry Ryland, who was appointed to the Citizens Solid Waste Advisory Committee by commissioner Jerold Dean, said statements made by Escambia County Medical Examiner Dr. Daniel Raulerson at the last commission meeting about the number of pancreatic cancer cases were "completely false."

"Pancreatic cancer, which used to be a rare tumor, is on the rise and there is no explanation," Raulerson told the commission.

Ryland provided documents from the Alabama Department of Public Health that showed the mortality rate in the area had dropped over the past several year.

Raulerson said he wasn't referring to fatal cases, "simply the occurrences of the disease, which are on the rise."

CCSA sent a press release Wednesday morning saying the group has hired Kennedy and Madonna LLP, an environmental law firm based in New York.

The firm is made up of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Kevin Madonna, both of whom have extensive backgrounds in environmental law.

