

FMC to pump out contaminated ground water

By Dean Rebuffoni
Staff Writer

As part of a \$6.7 million project, the FMC Corp. has agreed to prevent toxic chemicals from entering the Minneapolis water supply by pumping 250 million gallons of contaminated ground water from an aquifer in Fridley.

Traces of chemicals in the shallow aquifer are seeping into the Mississippi River just upstream from where Minneapolis draws its drinking water. The chemicals come from an FMC-owned tract that the federal government formerly called the na-

tion's most dangerous waste dump.

The tract is at FMC's Northern Ordnance Division plant, which makes weapons systems for the Navy.

Under an agreement approved Tuesday by state officials, FMC will pump contaminated ground water from beneath the site, and the water will be treated before being discharged into the Mississippi far downstream from Minneapolis. The project will cost FMC an estimated \$700,000, and could cost more if state officials determine that additional pumping is needed.

That is in addition to the \$6 million that FMC is spending to excavate and treat contaminated soil over the next 30 years in one of the biggest waste-cleanup projects in Minnesota. The FMC project is about a half-mile upstream from the point on the Mississippi where water is drawn for use by 550,000 people in Minneapolis and six suburbs that buy treated water from the city.

Under its agreement with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), FMC is required to pump out ground water tainted by toxic chemical wastes, primarily trichloroethylene, a suspected cancer-caus-

ing substance. That work is intended to prevent ground water containing harmful levels of that substance from seeping beyond the company's property line and into the Mississippi.

After the tainted water is brought to the surface, it will be discharged into a sanitary sewer that runs to the big metropolitan sewage-treatment plant at Pig's Eye Lake in St. Paul. There the water will be treated before being discharged into the river.

FMC's agreement with the MPCA does not require the company to pump out all contaminated ground

water from beneath its property. Rather, it requires the removal of all ground water containing trichloroethylene at concentrations greater than the level considered necessary to protect public health and water quality at the Minneapolis water intake.

FMC also has agreed to pay \$9,578 into the state's hazardous-waste "superfund," which is designed to help clean up worrisome dumps. That money is to reimburse the MPCA for costs it has incurred investigating the FMC site in Fridley. In

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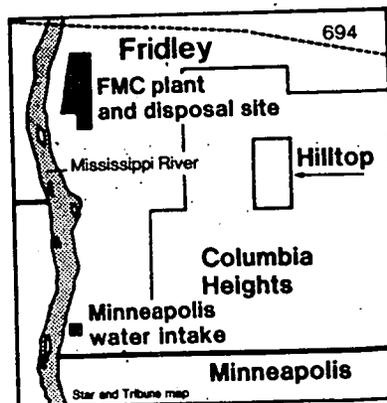
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addition, FMC will reimburse the state fund for future expenses incurred by the MPCA in carrying out the agreement approved yesterday.

But the key feature of the agreement is the removal of contaminated ground water, said David Richfield, the MPCA official overseeing the cleanup project.

"We believe that five years of pumping will result in an adequate cleanup," he said. "That would constitute about 250 million gallons of contaminated water."

Richfield said the state agency will monitor the project, and after two years will annually reassess the need for additional pumping of tainted water from the aquifer, which is 75 to 100 feet deep. Ground water in the



aquifer generally flows westward toward the Mississippi.

The MPCA said tests show that ground water beneath the FMC site

has concentrations of up to 30,000 parts per billion of trichloroethylene. Those levels fall to 150 parts per billion or less in ground water just beyond the FMC property line. The maximum level for that chemical in public water supplies is 5 parts per billion.

Arlen Wittrock, an FMC spokesman, said the pumping project will cost an estimated \$700,000. All told, FMC will spend at least \$6.7 million to clean up the Fridley site, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) cited in 1983 as the nation's most dangerous dump, largely because of its proximity to the Minneapolis water intake. FMC's cleanup work has since prompted the EPA to reclassify the tract, and it now is listed as the 17th most worrisome site on a national list of several

hundred dumps.

In terms of money actually committed to cleanup work, the FMC project is the second largest in Minnesota. Richfield said the biggest such project was in Oakdale, where 3M Co. has spent \$11 million to clean up several dumps.

The bulk of FMC's money was spent excavating and treating 38,600 cubic yards of contaminated soil. It is contained in a large, clay-lined vault that FMC built on its property. Within the vault, soil is forced by air through synthetic filters designed to neutralize the toxicity of the chemicals. The air is gradually emitted into the atmosphere, a process that the MPCA says does not threaten health or the environment.

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