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Pollution claim breeds skeptics

Residents don't buy argument

By Jack Spillane
Herald Staff

PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD — Some local residents reacted skeptically Tuesday evening to recent Portsmouth Naval Shipyard statements that preliminary studies of hazardous waste sites at the yard, and in adjacent water bodies, pose no immediate danger to human health and the environment.

However, other citizens, who have worked with the government reviewing ongoing shipyard and Environmental Protection Agency studies of the effect of past shipyard disposal practices said they are encouraged by the initial data.

Joint EPA/shipyard research indicates the levels of toxic substances going into water bodies adjacent to the yard are not dangerous.

Navy and government spokesman told a public audience at Traip Academy on Tuesday that preliminary studies of hazardous waste sites at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, and in the Piscataqua River and Great Bay Estuarine system, show no immediate danger to human health or the environment. They were presenting the official results of the latest in an ongoing series of studies the yard is conducting to address the issue of past hazardous waste disposal practices.

Shipyard environmental affairs spokesman Jim Tayon outlined a series of sampling methods that indicated levels of chemical contaminants seeping into water bodies and groundwater from disposal practices ended in the 1970s are within EPA health safety levels.

Both EPA and Maine Department of Environmental Pro-

tection spokesmen pronounced themselves satisfied that current evidence shows little evidence of contamination.

"The offshore study shows serious contamination is not a problem," said Ernest Waterman of the EPA.

However, Roger Cole, a Kittery resident who has long followed shipyard environmental issues, questioned whether the "no danger" statements were not premature. "I do have a problem with sweeping statements like there is no immediate threat when they haven't been verified by the EPA," he said.

Cole said he continues to be impressed by the many open meetings on the yard's environmental

studies run by Tayon, but he expressed reservations about dangerous metals that emanate airborne from the site. The studies indicated airborne particles are not a problem because of prevailing wind patterns, but Cole wondered if they could be if the wind changed.

Capt. Lewis Felton, the shipyard commander, advised against making any conclusions about the fate of such particles without hard scientific data. Dr. Eileen Mahoney, a private consultant working on the environmental study, pointed out that although the airborne study makes no conclusion on health risks, the levels of airborne contaminants were within the EPA

levels indicating health risks.

Kittery Town Manager Philip McCarthy, a citizen member of the technical review committee reviewing the shipyard studies, said he felt the concerns of Cole and others arose from a misunder-

standing. He said the shipyard's statement regarding health were not meant as a blanket statement but as reports of initial studies. "I would feel very comfortable saying there is no evidence to date to support any health risk," he said.

