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Community input sought for base clean-up

BY JILL BAUTER

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The U.S. Navy is seeking community members to oversee ongoing clean-up efforts at an old landfill site near the Crooked River subdivision.

Officials from Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base plan to assemble technical experts and community members to serve on a Restoration Advisory Board. The group will monitor clean-up efforts for groundwater contamination which was discovered two years ago.

Since a volatile organic compound known as vinyl chloride was found in groundwater, a technical review committee has been assessing the contamination and conducting well tests in and around Crooked River subdivision.

Officials believe the contamination is coming from an old landfill site located on the base. The contamination is spreading towards Crooked River subdivision which is adjacent to the old landfill site.

While the source of the contamination has not been determined, officials are ready to begin environmental clean-up efforts, said Mike Patterson, deputy for Facilities and Environmental department.

"There was some concern that with the technical review committee there wasn't enough community input to make good decisions," said Patterson, who will serve as the Navy co-chair of the Restoration Advisory Board.

While the contamination poses no immediate health risks to area residents, many may be impacted by environmental clean-up efforts. Residents currently use city water for drinking purposes, but many homes have irrigation wells which accelerate the spread of contaminated groundwater.

The board will include five community members and representatives from the Georgia Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Natural Resources. Community members are not expected to have any special technical knowledge.

"We are going to back up and bring everyone up to speed," Patterson said. "We don't want anyone to feel intimidated. We don't expect community members to be experts."

Criteria for community members has not yet been determined, but officials would like the membership to be diverse.

Since public concern has dwindled since the vinyl chloride was discovered, criteria for membership on the restoration board will probably be flexible, said Patterson.

"I guess until people feel they are being impacted, they don't feel that sense of urgency.

Members are expected to attend an estimated four to six meetings annually. To serve on the board, members must be impacted by the environmental clean-up efforts, Patterson added.

The board's meetings will be

public, and the minutes of all meetings will be kept on file at the Camden County Public Library, he said.

Applications for board membership are due by Sept. 1 to the Public Affairs Office at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. Those interested in the Restoration Advisory Board may call Chief Stacey Byington at 673-4714 or John Garner at 673-8845.

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