

Navy starts decontaminating White Oak center

Owner of tainted well moves out, citing lingering safety concerns

by Meredith Narcum
Staff Writer

U.S. Navy officials announced Thursday they have begun cleaning up cancer-causing chemicals found in the southeast corner of the former Naval Surface Warfare Center at White Oak.

But the Navy has not done enough to make Gary Irby feel safe. The Adelphi resident has moved his wife and three young children from his home downhill from the base because his water is no longer safe for drinking and bathing, he said.

Other area residents backed Irby at a Restoration Advisory Board meeting with Navy, Army and Environmental Protection Agency officials Thursday night. The board meets bimonthly to discuss the environmental cleanup and consists of Navy, Army, EPA and state environmental officials as well as local residents.

Several residents Thursday de-

manded the Navy either pay for Irby's move or hook him up to the city water supply.

"I've been sitting here listening to you, and as a citizen I get very bewildered at the bureaucratic talk, the gobbledygook that goes back and forth," said Hillandale resident Malcom Purisch, also a friend of Irby's. "No real action has been taken to relieve Mr. Irby's situation. There shouldn't be any dilly-dallying with reports. It bothers me our tax dollars are being wasted in this fashion."

When officials announced the budget for environmental cleanup at the base, residents responded they weren't getting enough protection for the amount of tax dollars spent.

The Navy's budget is \$5.9 million for fiscal 1998 and \$6.5 million for fiscal 1999, said Armalia Berry, Navy environmental coordinator for the project.

The Navy admits Irby's well and

the streams bordering his property contain TCE, or trichloroethylene, a chemical used as a solvent for cleaning electrical equipment, among other things. Studies have shown it causes cancer in laboratory rats.

Although the Navy installed a water filter at Irby's home, Irby said he still worries about an odor coming from his shower water. Navy officials also have admitted that TCE content in the ground water is increasing, although they said it still is below what the federal government says is unsafe.

"I refuse to heat that water and pour it over my children," said Irby.

Last year, the Navy requested Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission hook Irby to its water supply, but the commission refused because the work could endanger workers and the water supply itself, according to WSSC documents.

Navy officials assured residents that despite WSSC's refusal, they were in no danger.

Environmental consultant Jeff Orient of Tetra Tech NUS Inc. discussed progress made on "Site 46," a portion of the southeast corner of the base and surrounding property where Navy officials discovered TCE in 1996. The Navy is contracting with Tetra Tech to investigate the cleanup of the base.

Site 46 includes the adjacent Army property and nearby residential areas, including Irby's home. The site is ranked as the most important in the cleanup process, which could stretch into 2004, according to Navy documents.

In November, the Army installed an air stripper to remove TCE from ground water and cause it to evaporate. A storm water treatment system will be installed in two weeks, said Orient.

The Navy also is investigating three possible sources of TCE at Site 46, said Orient. The most likely source is a concrete centrifuge basin, 100 feet in diameter, used in the 1960s. The device used centrifugal force to separate substances of dif-

fering densities.

The Navy also is investigating a leach field and a building used to store hazardous waste, both near the southeast corner of the base, Orient said.

Environmental technicians sampled water from 43 points in the area of the base, said Orient. Technicians also dug nine permanent monitoring wells 30 to 60 feet deep to monitor chemicals in the aquifer, he said.

The cleanup is necessary before the land is developed for an FDA research center, but those development plans still are not confirmed, according to officials. The headquarters alone would bring about 5,900 people to the center and developers expect other government agencies and private tenants will move to the site as well.

To provide information on plans for the base's environmental cleanup, the Navy has placed 34 binders filled with the details at the White Oak Library, 11701 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring.

Jones Mill bridge to be repaired

by Brian A. Gnant
Staff Writer

Jones Mill Road travelers will have to follow detours starting next spring as renovations begin on the bridge

to about 9 and 1/2 feet wide.

Construction will close the bridge for about nine months, Mitra Pedocem, a senior engineer with the county's Department of Public Works and Transportation, told the board.



*When her home isn't safe,
and she doesn't need a nursing home...*

Section: 10.06
Site 20903-5640 (White Oak)
Doc #: 0023

00236