



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Ousted EPA official: Stop dragging feet in dioxin cleanup

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By Jeff Kart

jkart@bc-times.com | 894-9639

Mary Gade, the former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency chief for Region 5 in Chicago, paid a surprise visit to a Thursday meeting at Saginaw Valley State University.

Gade was ousted from her post in May 2007 by the Bush administration, allegedly for taking too-tough a stance on the process for cleaning up toxic dioxins from historic Dow Chemical discharges in the Saginaw Bay watershed.

Gade drove to SVSU to tell EPA and state Department of Environmental Quality officials that she thinks a new Superfund process that's since been instituted for dealing with pollution in the Tittabawassee and Saginaw rivers and Saginaw Bay will only delay a comprehensive cleanup, potentially for years.

"I'm concerned that people in this community, after 30 years, get justice," she said.

And the process being followed is one that Dow apparently requested, according to a letter unveiled at the meeting by Terry Miller, chairman of the Bay City area Lone Tree Council, an environmental group.

Dow officials didn't speak at the meeting, and EPA officials didn't dispute Miller's characterization of the letter.

Dioxins are chemical byproducts believed to cause cancer and damage reproductive and immune systems.

In 2007, Gade ordered Dow to initiate cleanup on the river system after testing found some of the highest levels of dioxins in the nation.

EPA officials on Thursday insisted that their involvement in the process will expedite a cleanup, and federal resources will now be combined with state resources to make sure that happens.

"We've made good progress," said Frank Ruswick, a DEQ senior policy advisor.

Wendy Carney, an EPA remedial response branch chief, said her agency hopes to see activities like bank stabilization, shoreline excavation or sediment removal on sites in the Tittabawassee River continue this year and in 2010. More projects would follow downstream on a

yearly basis.

But Gade, now an environmental consultant with offices in Evanston, Ill., said a cleanup process already was in place under Dow's state hazardous waste operating license before she was fired and new officials moved in with the Superfund process.

"This issue should be settled quickly," she said. "It already has been settled."

What's more, Gade said, the EPA is using a Superfund Alternative Approach, which is more guidance-based than regulatory.

The meeting was called to tell residents about a public comment process that will follow private negotiations now ongoing between Dow and the EPA under the Superfund process.

A 60-day deadline for those negotiations ends in mid-

February, but can be extended another 30 days.

Gade asked EPA officials if they could guarantee the public will be able to comment on and influence a settlement before it's finalized.

"I'm not in a position to guarantee that," said Mary Logan, an EPA remedial project manager.

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