



April 7, 2009

## Group concerned about Ithaca Gun dust

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As the Ithaca Gun demolition proceeds, three members of the Community Advisory Group are questioning whether the city and state are doing enough to protect neighbors from potentially contaminated dust.

Group member Walter Hang sent an e-mail to Mayor Carolyn Peterson last week arguing that the demolition contractors are not using enough water to suppress dust and that there is insufficient monitoring to know whether potentially contaminated demolition dust is moving off-site. Hang is president of Ithaca-based Toxics Targeting, which maps polluted and hazardous sites in New York state.

Group members Charles Izzo, a child development expert, and Kathy Luz Herrera, a Tompkins County legislator, responded in agreement with Hang. There are nine members of the advisory group, and the e-mail went to all of them, along with a variety of local and state representatives.

City and state Department of Environmental Conservation officials respond that the air monitoring system being overseen by the state Department of Health is ensuring the safety of the neighborhood.

DEC Environmental Engineer Gary Holmes and Nels Bohn, director of community development for the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency and speaking on behalf of Mayor Peterson, said the contractors are following their approved demolition plan, and air monitors have been effective in showing that dust is not leaving the site or harming neighbors.

"I have observed the Ithaca Gun demolition on numerous occasions in recent months and have grown increasingly concerned about the project's environmental and public health impact," Hang wrote. "During the demolition, there has often been extremely limited use of water to suppress dust or no dust suppression at all. As a result, heavy equipment has generated fugitive dust emissions that I repeatedly observed blowing off-site."

"It appears to me that the efforts to protecting the surrounding community from hazardous debris and dust (have) been less than diligent," Izzo said.

Holmes responded that he is on site at Ithaca Gun two to three times per week and Bianchi demolition contractors are using between 55-60,000 gallons of water per day to suppress dust.

"There's no danger there," Holmes said.

"I would love to have absolutely no dust leave the site at all either, but it's a question of when is clean clean enough?" Bohn said. "Right now I have a lot of confidence that the air monitoring system is working effectively and is providing that level of protection that we're not seeing neighbors being negatively impacted by the process."

Hang, and then Izzo and Luz Herrera, also urged the city to test the soil in neighboring properties, once the demolition is completed, to make sure that contamination hasn't spread from the site.

"After all demolition activities have ceased, I request you to require soil monitoring to be conducted every ten feet along the boundary of properties that adjoin the factory site," Hang said. "If elevated contaminant levels are identified compared to the confirmatory soil clean up data generated by the Environmental Protection Agency, I request the pollution to be remediated."

The EPA undertook a multi-million dollar cleanup at Ithaca Gun several years ago, but it never completed the job.

Bohn responded that if air monitors aren't detecting contamination leaving the site, it's unlikely that it's migrated there.

"There's always an ability to gather more data and give greater assurances, which is not a bad thing at all, and I think a lot of people would prefer that, as long as they don't have to pay for it," Bohn said.

Hang cited the ongoing coal tar cleanup on West Court Street as a contrasting example to Ithaca Gun. The Court Street cleanup, with its completely enclosed structure and air handling equipment, "is far superior to the meager efforts at Ithaca Gun," he said.

New York State Electric and Gas is paying for the remediation at Court Street. The Ithaca Gun cleanup is being financed by two state grants and private development money. Land owner Wally Diehl and developer Frost Travis have proposed to convert the site into high-end condos and a public walkway to the Ithaca Falls overlook.

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