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DRN Calls for 180 Day Review of CDC Report

Press Alert

Centers for Disease Control Issues Supplemental VX Nerve Agent Report
DRN calls for 180 Day Public Comment Period

The long-awaited and curiously delayed Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report concerning the U.S. Army's plan to bring VX nerve agent waste to the Dupont Chambers Works facility in Deepwater, NJ, has been released. The report gives a green light to the proposed project.

Congressional representatives had commissioned a report by the CDC in order to gain an assessment from the federal agency of the risks associated with the proposal. In April 2005 the CDC issued a joint report with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that concluded that the proposed discharge by Dupont into the Delaware River would harm aquatic life, making the project too dangerous. The Army and Dupont submitted further information to the CDC since last year, which led to this supplemental report based on new information. The report was expected to be released months ago. In February the EPA sent a letter to the CDC saying many of its earlier concerns had been addressed but left several key issues unresolved. The EPA and CDC findings reportedly have been undergoing a peer review process since that time. Congress was recently briefed on the supplemental report by the CDC.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network calls for a 180-day public review period for this CDC report. The report has been in the making for a year; the public should have a reasonable amount of time to assess the new report. It will also take time to gain public access to reference and background documents used to produce the report. Some documents requested under the Freedom of Information Act by Delaware Riverkeeper Network have taken months to track down. Doubtless, there are crucial reference documents that were used in this CDC report that will need to be examined and analyzed publicly.

"A 180-day review period is wholly justified", said Maya K. van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper. "This proposal represents an assault on the Delaware River and the communities that will be subject to the transport, handling, and disposal effects of VX nerve agent waste. The public deserves adequate time to digest this report", said van Rossum.

The U.S. Army now stores the 1,265 tons of VX nerve agent at its secure facility in Newport, Indiana. Conversion of the agent into VX hydrolysate (VXH) is underway; VXH is stored in newly constructed tanks in Newport awaiting further destruction. Recurrent problems with handling the waste product have plagued the Army; VXH is very caustic and has eaten through gaskets and seals and it is much more flammable than the Army originally estimated (the flashpoint is 68

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to 88 F degrees). The Army proposes to have Dupont truck the VXH to New Jersey over public highways and/or rail for 813.84 to 1097.66 miles (5 different routes are being considered), across Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and finally New Jersey.

“The Dupont proposal has met with fierce opposition from all quarters and that opposition continues to expand. The people and their elected representatives will fight the Army’s plan to truck VX nerve agent waste and discharge it to the Delaware River”, said Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network. The Governors of New Jersey and Delaware, elected representatives, municipal and county governments, fishermen, watermen, recreational boaters, conservationists, environmental groups and thousands of residents have gone on the record in opposition to the Army’s Dupont plan. Congress has called for a General Accounting Office analysis.

The Army has to take further official action under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) before approving the Dupont plan. NJ Department of Environmental Protection has expressly forbidden Dupont from accepting VXH without a major discharge permit modification; that permit process would require further scientific and technical analysis and public input.