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VX Waste to Dupont in NJ is Dead, Says Dupont

The Associated Press has reported at 2:13 EST that VX nerve agent waste will not be processed at the company's hazardous waste treatment facility on the Delaware River in Deepwater NJ. Nick Fanandakis, Dupont vice-president and general manager for chemical solutions, announced today that they are pulling out of the Army's plan to ship VX nerve agent waste from the Army's Indiana storage facility to Dupont in Salem County. The company proposed to put the VX waste, called hydrolysate, through its treatment plant and then discharge it to the Delaware River.

"This kills the Army's plan to bring VX to the Delaware River. This is a great day for the River and the people of New Jersey, Delaware and the states that the nerve agent waste would have been trucked through. This is the right decision by Dupont—there is no way this ill-fated scheme would have survived the law suit we just filed and no way it could have been legally permitted by NJDEP", said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper. "The Delaware River needs to be protected and nurtured; it is NOT a dumping ground. That's why we fought the Army and Dupont's plan and why the public, Congressman Andrews, Senators Lautenberg and Menendez and Governor Corzine and Governor Minner, along with many others, all took a stand against this horribly bad idea", said van Rossum.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network and co-plaintiffs from organizations in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Kentucky filed a Complaint in federal District Court against the U.S. Army on December 21. The suit challenged the transport of VX hydrolysate from Indiana to New Jersey based on a federal statute that bans the transportation of chemical weapons across state lines and complained that federal environmental regulations were not being followed by the Army.

The Governors of New Jersey and Delaware, elected representatives, municipal and county governments, fishermen and boaters, conservationists, environmental groups and thousands of residents in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware went on record in opposition to the Army's Dupont plan. Opposition boomed since the Army first proposed the project in 2004.

The controversial proposal was made in early 2004 when the Army was denied approval to ship the waste to Ohio. Originally the VX stockpile was going to be destroyed on site in Indiana through a less risky process with no discharge of toxics to a waterway. Super Critical Water Oxidation was chosen as the safest method of destroying the VX stockpile and won support of the local residents and the State of Indiana following the 1997 international Chemical Weapons Treaty. Congress began to commit funds to install the system on site at the Army's facility. After the attacks of September 11, 2001 the federal administration made a decision to try to dispose of the weapons at an existing facility, arguing it would be faster than building a plant at the Army Depot at Newport.

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The option of off-site disposal, however, proved to be time-consuming and fraught with unforeseen problems. First the Army tried to send it to Ohio, who rejected it, then to New Jersey. Live VX, the deadliest nerve agent ever produced, is difficult to break down, highly flammable, more caustic than expected, and not uniform in its constituents due, in part, to various stabilizers used in the batches that make up the approximately 1,269 tons stored at Newport.

“One drop of VX nerve agent kills a person in just a few minutes. The VX hydrolysate they wanted to bring to New Jersey and the Delaware River is a breakdown product containing the ingredients of that terrible weapon. It never made any sense to try to move it off site. The Army should get to work now in earnest to destroy VX and all the chemical weapon stockpiles in the U.S. where each is stored by the most environmentally safe method possible”, said Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network.