

# Radioactive cleanup

## DOE begins project but likely will lose responsibility

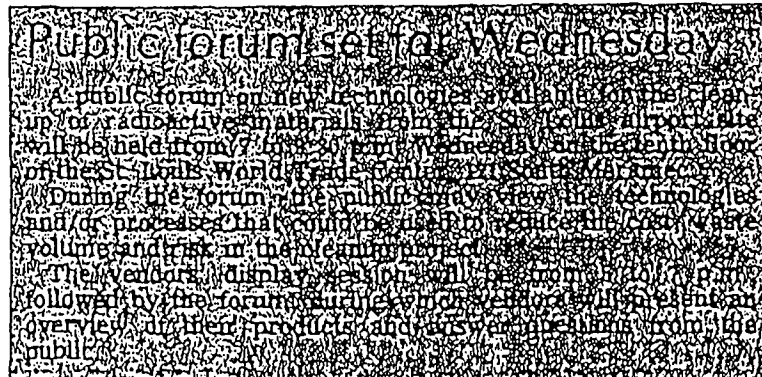
By Barbara Ponder  
Staff writer

North County and Washington, D.C., seem worlds apart, but those worlds seemed headed on a collision course last week.

In unincorporated North County, the Department of Energy (DOE) began the first phase of its plan to remove radioactive material from the 22-acre airport site.

In Washington, D.C., discussions continued over whether to transfer authority for such cleanup efforts from the DOE to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Richard Cavanagh, St. Louis County's director of health administration, heads a 12-person committee overseeing the DOE's cleanup efforts. The committee consists of representatives from environmental



groups and St. Louis county and city.

Cavanagh believes the transfer is nearly a done deal.

"We're concerned it could cause a delay in implementing current and future plans for the cleanup," Cavanagh said. "The Corps is very capable but they're going to be starting at square one."

Kristln Young from the office of U.S. Rep. Jim Talent, R-2nd Dist., expects confirmation of the transfer early next week.

"We've been hustling to ensure the site keeps moving forward . . .," Young said. "We've received assurances from the Corps that they're going to make sure it doesn't

affect the cleanup adversely."

Young said the Corps has a good track record in conducting such remediation projects in cooperation with the community.

However, Talent's office has not received a commitment the Corps will direct the cleanup from its St. Louis office and not from another location, Young said.

The airport site, situated adjacent to McDonnell Boulevard, is one of several sites in North County and St. Louis city contaminated with waste remaining from the development of the atomic bomb in World War II and research during the Cold War.

The first phase of the project to clean up the 22-acre site entails removing contaminated material, such as dirt, to an

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out-of-state disposal site.

Steve McCracken, the DOE's site manager, said the DOE would support the Corps during the transfer, if enacted.

"It (the cleanup) will continue to get done," McCracken said. "I think the momentum is there. The community is still going to be behind the work and they'll keep it moving."

Not everyone was happy to see the cleanup begin last week.

"I think they're rushing into this project and digging at the most vulnerable part of this 22-acre site, near Coldwater Creek Water," said Kay Drey, a member of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment. "They're going to be digging five feet from the creek. It's not very far and every bit of dirt is contaminated."

"Our view on beginning where we are is because it gives us a wider, cleaner buffer zone between the creek and the rest of the area to be excavated,"

## Public forum set for Wednesday

A public forum on new technologies available for the cleanup of radioactive materials from the St. Louis airport site will be held from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesday on the tenth floor of the St. Louis World Trade Center, 121 South Meramec.

During the forum, the public may view technologies and/or processes that could be used to reduce the cost, waste volume and risk in the cleanup project.

The vendor display session will be from 5 to 7 p.m. followed by the forum, during which vendors will present an overview of their products and answer questions from the public.

McCracken said.

Drey, of University City, resigned from the oversight committee Sept. 18, citing concerns about the project.

Drey said the DOE should have explored new technologies, such as a frozen soil barrier to protect the creek during excavation, before beginning the project.

The DOE is considering the use of new technologies. A public meeting displaying some of that technology is planned for Wednesday. (See box for details.)

Cavanagh stands by the over-

sight committee's approval of phase one, which will remove 5,000 cubic yards of soil or about the same amount as would be dug out to build six home foundations. Phase 1 will be completed in about five weeks.

A dry summer and extremely low groundwater levels make it an ideal time to begin the project, Cavanagh said.

"As a resident who lives along Coldwater Creek, I am quite concerned with whether I think it will save the creek from further contamination," Cavanagh said. "By doing this there will be more soil out."