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More seepage may be in river than originally believed

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FRANKLIN —A face-off Thursday night between Egyptian Lacquer Manufacturing Co. officials and critics of a clean-up plan for the Harpeth River brought news that more chemicals than originally believed might be flowing into the river.

Pam Davee, development director for the Harpeth River Watershed Association, says four seep holes along the Harpeth River were discovered this week and all are apparently redolent of the smell of toluene, a chemical used in paint-thinners.

"There is a potent, toluene smell," Davee said. "There's brown ooze."

The seeps were found by HRWA staff Wednesday. On Thursday night, Davee reported the findings to company and state officials and area residents during the latest public hearing on a proposed clean-up plan for the creek and river.

No decision about the company's plan, which is a revision of an earlier plan that was rejected by state leaders, will be made until all written comments are accepted by Aug. 22.

Egyptian Lacquer officials have said chemicals seeped underground through improperly wrapped pipes connected to chemical storage tanks, which have been removed. Among the chemicals found in wells and in the river is benzene, a known cause of cancer. However, company officials say they do not use benzene in their paints and coatings.

Up to this point, only four seeps on the river — all above the creek's location — had been found.

If the new seeps do contain chemicals, their discovery would offer further findings that the chemical pollution is going further downstream than believed.

Earlier tests of a well dug on Battle Ground Academy's campus on Franklin Road turned up chemicals in a monitoring well dug on its site near its playground months ago.

Crews dug trenches along the creek in order to catch the chemicals flowing underground.

"Liberty Creek is not the barrier for the contamination," Davee said. "It's moving beyond that."

Meeting stirs emotion

Meantime, fresh questions were raised about foul odors and complaints from neighbors of Egyptian Lacquer that may date back years.

During the meeting, Nashville attorney Ray "Chip" Throckmorton III gave Mayor John Schroer handwritten notes made in April 1995 by an unnamed city codes inspector that mentions complaints of neighbors on Liberty Pike about the Egyptian Lacquer site. Throckmorton said he got the notes from that inspector.

The report says the inspector, whom Throckmorton did not name, was supposed to give

complaints from residents about the Fort Granger Drive plant to his then-supervisor, who is now deceased.

But Schroer dismissed the old report and said inspectors are regularly asked to look into reports of foul odors.

"(Throckmorton) was acting like it was some big smoking gun," Schroer said. "I didn't see the gun or the smoke."

Said Throckmorton: "That's deeply disappointing that he would take that kind of attitude."

Meanwhile, Schroer, who has earlier been to the site near the Daniels Drive neighborhood, said he's convinced the work is on track, despite criticisms from HRWA.

"(Harpeth River Watershed Association) looks at things in the extreme, as they should," Schroer said. "I guess the question for Harpeth River (Watershed Association) is 'how clean does it need to be?' They may want it cleaner than what's required by law."

Davee responded that HRWA wants the river to meet federal clean-water standards.

Thursday's public hearing, which was the third since the discovery of chemicals, was the first where company president Kerry Mattox spoke about the 12-person company, which opened in Franklin in 1978. During the past 18 months, the company has spent \$1.3 million and was "embarrassed" about the pollution, Mattox said.

"It's our creek, too," Mattox said. "You're our neighbors. You're our community. We're committed to cleaning it up."

Attorney Penny, called the work "one of the most accelerated programs" and praised the company's commitment.

"Everything that we've asked and advised them to do, they've done it and not asked questions," Penny said. "Everything the state has asked us to do, we've done that."

But Mark Quarles, a geologist and environmental consultant, again reiterated his criticisms of the plan, which includes rerouting a portion of Liberty Creek and said the company has not defined the source of the pollution or its extent.

"I can tell you in the 20 years that I've been doing this . . . I have not seen an investigative activity like this that went so far and spent so much money without getting any meaningful results," Quarles said. "This is not an accelerated clean-up or investigation."
