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Wells

Continued from page one

of Environmental Management to test water wells in the area because of concerns about contamination from the landfill possibly effecting ground water. The samples were tested for 64 volatile organic compounds and 16 "landfill metals." No organic element was classified by GZA, the town's engineering consultants, as being unsatisfactory or beyond safety standards.

Other metals found in the 16 wells included barium, cobalt, nickel, zinc, copper, lead, methyl-tert-butyl-ether, and toluene. The levels of those metals — except as noted in the four wells classified as polluted — were below standards that GZA considers unacceptable.

"This has been of tremendous interest to all of us and I am extremely happy about the new results," Keiser said. "Obviously, we want to know how the first tests led to the inaccurate false positive," he noted. "A false negative would have been a health hazard. We have to eliminate and tighten laboratory procedures to avoid any problem again," he said.

GZA airing

As pleased as she was about the new results, Willis asked why the mistake was not traced immediately by the lab worker's supervisors at GeoEnvironmental GZA of Norton, Mass., consultants to the town for the closure of the former landfill and for the town highway barn that might be built there.

Willis said she was pleased years ago with the selection of GZA as consultant for the projects, because of the firm's national reputation. She then listed several points that she said led her more recently to express disappointment and concern about the firm's work. The councilors and residents agreed that the high test result should have immediately triggered the major review that eventually led to finding the error.

After nearly an hour of further discussion about concerns of potential well contamination and related matters, the councilors agreed to review GZA's work and why its principal engineers did not find the laboratory error before it was reported to the town and the property owner. Councilor Barbara Szeptowski said she wanted to determine why "we should not replace that project manager (who) brings about such questions and fears in this severe, severe, really severe issue."

Keiser agreed that the situation did not inspire confidence in the testing laboratory, a division of GZA, or in the supervisors "who could miss such a substantial aberration, such an atypical result." The council could consider directing GZA not to use its own lab for testing for the town, the town administrator said.

Keiser concluded that the situation "heightened fear and caused high anxiety in the community. There is a rosier side. There is not any cobalt. That is happy news. In all the wells tested, there are no significant exceedances, so no concern in the immediate area of the landfill."

Szeptowski responded, "I'm just shocked. . ." Conducting the meeting in the absence of Council President David Long, Council Vice President Julio DiGiando, interrupted and urged her to wait to talk about it at the next council meeting.

Keiser reported that the latest regularly scheduled quarterly report of monitoring wells at the former landfill itself, showed "no exceedances and some fluctua-

tions, seasonal variations, that are not significant and all within safe drinking water standards."

Councilman Michael Schnack referred to some trends cited in the report. Keiser said the "trends are important but not significant."

Council role

DiGiando gave a detailed commentary on the concerns of townspeople that councilors had not responded to public concerns as evidenced at the March 13 meeting, which deteriorated into expressions of bitterness over the landfill and highway barn issues.

DiGiando said this week he sensed that some people thought "we're trying to do something harmful." He suggested that impression was created by the conflicts in scientific claims between GZA and MacTech, consultants for the North End Concerned Citizens.

He said the council is trying to get to facts and awaiting the findings of the DEM. "We are not trying to duck it. I am concerned about the polarization." He suggested that the DEM is a third opinion, and the regulating higher authority, in the face of two conflicting engineering opinions.

Szeptowski said the councilors were asking the public "to back off and give us the opportunity to see what the state says. We are not the enemy. We are doing the best for the citizens. A lot of information is needed." She asked townspeople to "believe in us." The council is not looking to hurt anyone, she said.

Councilman William Kelly said he was "perturbed by the faux pas of GZA. DEM will dictate if and how the landfill" will be closed and used.

Councilman Michael Schnack emphasized that the council would not make any decision that would impair the health of anyone anywhere. "I will look at it with a clean and open mind," he said. He also praised the column by Keiser in the March 23 Jamestown Press as "very well stated."

The councilors made a point, however, that they would await the report of the DEM, the governing authority, on the town's plan to close the former landfill and build a highway barn on the site. That report may be available in mid-April, according to the town administrator and information he has from the DEM. The DEM has not yet confirmed when the report will be ready.

Neighbors of the landfill were originally concerned about monitoring plans for after the landfill closure. Their concerns were increased when the town began a year ago to study the possibility of adding the garage and further disturbing the long decaying garbage buried there. The dual issues have split townspeople over how to proceed with each concern.

About cobalt

Cobalt has been found at very low readings in the monitoring wells at the landfill, as well as at the Willis' well, and at the neighboring King property.

At low levels, cobalt is part of vitamin B12, essential for good health. At high levels, it may harm the lungs and heart. Cobalt is used to produce alloys for aircraft engines, magnets, grinding and cutting tools, artificial hip and knee joints. Cobalt compounds also are used to color glass, ceramics, and paints. Radioactive cobalt is used for radiation therapy, and for sterilizing medical equipment, making "dirty" bombs, manufacturing plastics and irradiating food.

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JAMESTOWN BRIDGE 1940 - 2006



The demolition of the old Jamestown Bridge is underway. A controlled explosion, resulting in demolition of the through truss (superstructure at the center of the bridge), is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, April 11, 2006.

The new Jamestown-Verrazzano Bridge (Route 138) will be closed to traffic that day between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Motorists are advised to seek alternate routes and avoid the area if at all possible during the closure time.

The demolition will be broadcast live at Cox Digital Cable Channel 124 and will be webcast at www.dot.state.ri.us.

There are no nearby viewing areas, but the University of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay Campus, South Ferry Road, Narragansett, has a clear line of sight to the bridge.

The demolition is subject to change by adverse weather or safety concerns.

Rhode Island Department of Transportation

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