

Whirlpool Decontamination Plans

Associated Press

FORT SMITH, Ark. (AP) — The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality on Friday laid out steps that Whirlpool Corp. must take to address contamination on its closed Fort Smith plant site and a nearby neighborhood.

The agency's Remedial Action Decision Document requires Whirlpool to seal off the surface of the area of contaminated soils. The document also requires the company to use a chemical oxidant to neutralize the trichloroethylene that seeped into the soil and groundwater under part of the plant.

The plan allows the contamination under the neighborhood, where residents have seen property values plummet, to decompose naturally.

Spokesmen for Whirlpool did not respond to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette's requests for comment Friday (<http://bit.ly/jkCp96> [1]).

But company spokesman Jeff Noel said Monday that in anticipation of the department's ruling, the company's environmental consulting firm has been taking soil samples and surveying the ground to prepare for tests, the newspaper reported.

Whirlpool has 30 days from Friday's document signing to submit its final action plan to the agency, the newspaper reported.

Noel said it could take a year to 18 months to begin the full-scale treatment to neutralize the trichloroethylene in the soil and groundwater.

The agency said in the decision document that if the selected remedy does not show "significant reduction" in the level of contaminants on the Whirlpool property in two years, the company will have to submit an alternate plan for consideration.

Fort Smith City Administrator Ray Gosack declined to comment on the department's decision document Friday, saying he only received it late Friday afternoon and did not have a chance to read through the approximately 80 pages.

The document contains comments made during a Nov. 12 public hearing in Fort Smith on the proposed plan along with the agency's responses, according to the newspaper. Two city directors spoke at the hearing: Kevin Settle and Pam Weber.

Settle said he disagreed with the proposed remedy, saying the plan did not address how to make whole the neighborhood residents whose properties were devalued by the contamination.

Weber said she didn't believe the agency gave as much consideration to the

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neighborhood residents as it did to Whirlpool.

"You say you don't have the power to help with their property? Of course you do," Weber said. "You have to do what's right for these property owners, and the opinion of myself and most of these property owners, you have chosen the cheapest route for Whirlpool."

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[1] <http://bit.ly/JkCp96>