02/15/2007

Depot to close after mercury moved

By: John Patten , Managing Editor
Hillsborough Beacon

The shipments will take about 39 days, with five truckloads each day.

When the last truckload of mercury leaves Hillsborough's Defense Logistics Agency depot on Route 206 sometime this summer, the depot will be nearly empty. A few months later, the DLA expects to close and vacate the site.

Depot Manager James Farley says most of the employees will be qualified for early retirement, but some may look to relocate to other facilities.

"It's a little upsetting to know you're working yourself out of a job," Mr. Farley said Monday after officials reviewed the plans for moving the mercury to a site in Hawthorne, Nev., and closing the depot.

The meeting was organized by U.S. Rep. Mike Ferguson, R-6th, to give residents more information regarding the planned removal of the more than 2,600 metric tons of mercury stored here — and to give residents a chance to query federal officials about those plans.

Cornel Holder, Defense National Stockpile Center — which manages the DLA — administrator, confirmed the shipments will begin in the summer after mercury from the agency's New Haven, Ind., facility has been shipped to Nevada.

Mr. Holder said the shipments will take about 39 days once begun, with five truckloads per day. Trucking will be managed by the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, which performs shipping for the Department of Defense.

The mercury will be shipped in the lined and sealed steel drums it's currently stored in — containers Mr. Holder said have been tested and shown not to leak and able to withstand even a trailer

tipping over.

But residents at the meeting expressed concerns over the trucks' route out of town — when asked which direction the trucks will take, Mr. Farley said, "North – the fastest way out of town."

Several residents questioned the security and safety of getting the shipments around the notorious Somerville Circle and Assemblyman Peter Biondi, R-Hillsborough, suggested a police escort may help assure the trucks reach Route 287 without problems.

Mr. Holder said the mercury will be the last commodity stored at the depot to be removed, and after it's gone, the depot will be "unmanned" and prepared to be turned over to the General Services Administration, from which the DLA rents the space.

That means any environmental contamination must be cleaned up, and the officials stressed their agency's commitment to clean the depot property.

"We were the first federal agency to earn EMS (environmental management systems) certification and we will continue to do that," Mr. Holder said.

Mr. Holder and Essie Schloss, DNSC deputy administrator, stressed the ongoing environmental monitoring at the site as well as plans for the environmental cleanup. Mr. Holder noted the agency presented plans for digging up soil contaminated by materials stored outside of buildings —including lead and ferrochrome — with the New jersey Department of Environmental Protection last month.

The depot was opened after World War II to warehouse supplies deemed necessary to the military. Over the years, stockpiles of zinc, tungsten, beryllium, rubber, iodine, quartz and tannin extract and many other materials have been stored there in addition to the mercury.

Local officials focused on the mercury storage after an early consolidation by the DNSC moved several hundred tons of mercury from a depot in Binghamton, N.Y.

The site is scheduled to close — or be "unmanned" if any work remains to be done — by October. After the meeting, Mr. Farley said the closure is not the result of the mercury being moved, but rather the decision by administrators to consolidate all materials.

The meeting opened with Mayor Anthony Ferrera noting the removal "has been a long time coming here in Hillsborough."

Mr. Ferguson said early in his first term in office he learned "this was not an appropriate place to store the largest stockpile of mercury."

"It was a great victory certainly for all of us who worked on this for so many years," he said of the decision to move the supply, "but also a great victory for this community and a victory for common sense."

News Source
http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17853932&BRD=1091&PAG=461&dept_id=425742&rfi=6