

## 2229 Main Street Oversight Committee

*Members: Kerry Diskin, Deborah Farnsworth, Len Rappoli, Pam Rockwell, Fred Seward, Candace Wight, and Board of Selectmen liaison Ann Shapiro*

The 2229 Main Street Oversight Committee was formed to monitor the cleanup at Starmet, formerly Nuclear Metals, Inc. (NMI), a former defense contractor that is now a superfund site. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the agency in charge of the cleanup. Currently EPA is overseeing a Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS). The investigation will determine the extent of the contamination at the site and the pathways by which the public may be exposed. The feasibility study will develop possible cleanup strategies. The EPA has hired the consulting firm *de maximis inc.* to conduct the RI/FS.

This year the committee consulted with *de maximus* about the requirements for a third round of soil and water samples and toxicity tests. Most of these samples were completed in the fall. This site is known to be contaminated with depleted uranium, beryllium, and other laboratory chemicals. There are also PCBs located in most of the areas where there is uranium contamination in surface soil, which means that these areas will definitely trigger a remediation action. (These areas are all close to buildings and enclosed by fences.) The major plume of uranium in the ground above the bedrock has also been identified heading from the former holding basin, under the buildings, and towards the Assabet River. New data will help delineate the outer boundaries of these areas and evaluate the toxic effects of these chemicals on the environment. Additionally, some high levels of natural uranium have been found in some bedrock wells, and the third round of samples will help determine if this is caused by other chemicals used at the site, such as lime or nitrates. The committee also commented on draft maps outlining how the property will be divided up to evaluate the human health risk during the next phase of the investigation.

During 2007 the EPA moved forward on its plans to remove the buildings at the Starmet site. *De maximus* presented an outline for an Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis (EE/CA) to the EPA's Remedy Review Board. The committee and the Concord Fire Chief both contributed comments encouraging the EPA to move forward with a plan to completely remove the buildings as quickly as possible. There is radioactive contamination in all parts of the buildings, including offices, due mostly to a leaky roof and standing water. In some areas, water is above the level of the electrical outlets. EPA is negotiating with the remaining Starmet associated workers to find a new location for their production facilities, so that the physical work of removing the buildings can begin.

The complications of responding to an emergency in such hazardous environment were highlighted in June when a small fire broke out in a storage area. The fire was extinguished very quickly. Unfortunately, it was in a building that contains radioactive materials, so that in addition to worrying about danger from the fire, firefighters also had to make sure they did not track any materials out of the building. This meant that firefighters had to be checked for contamination before they removed their heavy protective suits (not a pleasant wait in the hot summer weather) and that equipment and even fire trucks needed to be sampled and washed down. And this was only the short list of all the extra precautions that the fire department employed that night...

The good news about this unfortunate event is that the Concord Fire Department had spent a lot of time planning for emergencies at the Starmet superfund site, and these preparations paid off. A sprinkler system that the fire department required Starmet to install recently functioned well and sounded an alarm. The fire department responded and extinguished the fire in about 45 minutes with no injuries. A hazmat team responded and decontaminated firefighters and equipment so that no materials were tracked off the site. The fire department was in contact with the EPA and appropriate state agencies, and air monitors were set up to check for releases of hazardous materials. Local residents were notified of the emergency via the reverse 911 system. Teams from Maynard, Acton, and Lincoln also responded to the emergency.

Town staff met with the Fire Department and agencies the next day to discuss what happened. The Fire Department did a thorough investigation of the entire site and developed a checklist of hazardous conditions to be dealt with (like repacking hazardous materials lockers so that the doors can be closed.) A fire that should have only taken 45 minutes to deal with, instead took over 8 hours and thousands of dollars to extinguish. This incident has increased the pressure on Starmet to vacate the property so that the dangerous buildings can be removed. The committee is very grateful for the careful planning and meticulous care that the Concord Fire Department used during this emergency and for the open communication with this committee, agencies, and Concord citizens that they have shown throughout the cleanup planning.

In September, the members of the committee met with Martha Steele of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), Center of Environmental Health, to review the Department's public health assessment for the Nuclear Metals/Starmet Superfund Site. At the request of Concord citizens, the MDPH has been reviewing information about the Starmet site to determine if contamination at the site is causing cancer in Concord. The MDPH receives a notification every

time a person is diagnosed with cancer in Massachusetts that includes data about the person's age, gender, home address, employment category, and cancer type. This information is organized every five years and published as a cancer incidence rate. Responding to public concern, MDPH initiated further study on the following cancer types: lung cancer, bone cancer, thyroid cancer, multiple myeloma, brain, leukemia, melanoma, and testicular cancer. The evaluation looked at smaller geographic areas, such as census tracts around the Starmet site. In addition, MDPH evaluated lung and bone cancers (cancers that are known to be associated with depleted uranium) for the neighboring communities of Acton, Maynard, and Sudbury. They also tried to interview subjects who had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer or multiple myeloma or their relatives. (Thyroid cancer rates were slightly above the state average at the start of the study and several multiple myeloma sufferers lived close to each other but not adjacent to Starmet even if the total multiple myeloma rate was not above the state average.) This study used data that included the early 1990s. More recent data is now available. At the meeting, MDPH presented plans to continue their investigation using the more recent data and to expand their investigation to include breast and ovarian cancers. However, they clearly pointed out that they do not currently see a link between any cancers found in Concord and exposure to contaminants from the Starmet site. At this time MDPH does not think a full public health survey is warranted in Concord. At the conclusion of the new phase of the study, there will be a public meeting to discuss the results.

The committee also communicates with other groups that are involved in the cleanup: in particular Citizen's Research and Environmental Watch (CREW). In early 2007, the 2229 Main Street Oversight Committee supported CREW's Article 40 motion to create a modified zoning district for the parcel that is currently occupied by the Starmet superfund site. The committee recognized that if the site is to be restored to anything more than a park, we all need to start planning what we will have there soon and make sure that EPA knows about it. Committee members attended meetings and provided information about the cleanup for the Planning Board, the Economic Council, the Concord Business Partnership, and the Board of Selectmen. This motion passed at Town Meeting. Changing the zoning has let EPA know that our Town expects a thorough cleanup and that we want a site that is clean and safe and tax revenue producing. A residential cleanup level will mean that more of the site will be cleaned up enough to build on: dig septic systems and service lines, grade to make level, buildable surfaces, and not require perpetual fences and security.

CREW also collected and evaluated off-site soil samples for depleted uranium as part of a study that began in 2006. The Town allowed CREW to collect samples on Town property and committee member Fred Seward observed some of the sampling. CREW has not yet released the findings of the study.

More information about the Starmet cleanup can be found at the following websites. The committee does not have control over the content of these sites:

- [www.nmisite.org](http://www.nmisite.org) is the website created by the contractor *de maximis*. It includes a list of the current activities at the site, including data and maps from the sampling that has been completed.
- The EPA also has a website with historical information. Go to [www.epa.gov/region1/superfund/findsite/fndindex.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region1/superfund/findsite/fndindex.htm) and search for “Nuclear Metals”.
- [www.crewconcord.org](http://www.crewconcord.org) is the website for the environmental advocacy group CREW.