

2229 Main Street Oversight Committee

Members: Kerry Diskin, Deborah Farnsworth, Len Rappoli, Pam Rockwell, Fred Seward, Candace Wight, retired member David Erickson(May), 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. In 2006, two major activities have been happening at the site: a remedial investigation of contamination outside the buildings and removal of barrels of waste material that were stored inside the buildings.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is managing the cleanup and overseeing the 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.

The second round of soil and water samples were taken and evaluated this year. 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. Additionally, some high levels of natural uranium have been found in some bedrock wells, and more samples are being collected to determine if this is caused by other chemicals used at the site, such as lime or nitrates.

The committee felt that the data suggested that some off-site soil sampling for uranium might be useful, however the EPA disagreed and did not request these samples be taken. Citizen's Research and Environmental Watch (CREW), a local watchdog group, has decided to collect and evaluate off-site soil samples for depleted uranium. The Town is allowing CREW to collect samples on Town property and committee member Fred Seward has been observing the sampling. The first round of samples was taken in December and the results will be presented and discussed in 2007.

This summer, the committee reviewed and commented on the Screening Level Environmental Risk Assessment (SLERA) for the site. This purpose of this document is to make sure that any threat to the environment from contamination at the site is tested for. In addition to further testing for contaminants in soil and sediments, the SLERA also lays out plans for toxicity testing and surveys of the animals at risk at the site. In addition to the adjacent river, wooded areas, and cooling pond, the site contains a sensitive habitat: a

sphagnum bog. The challenge is to be able to sample and clean up the bog without destroying it in the process. The committee provided ideas about how to find a reference bog that is not on the site to compare the toxicity and animal surveys to. The committee also recommended a sediment study that had been done on the Assabet River in 2004 upstream of the site to be used for comparison. The committee also noted that the EPA has a renowned expert overseeing the environmental risk assessment, and we have a lot of confidence in the EPA's oversight of this part of the process.

The EPA has also mentioned to the committee that it is time to start thinking about what the site will be used for once the cleanup is over, since things like future uses and zoning are taken into account during the next phase of the RI/FS: the human risk assessment. EPA has continually made the point that the site is zoned for industrial uses, not residential ones. While the committee has pointed out that there are residential buildings and a children's camp located on Forest Ridge Road in Concord, which has the same zoning as 2229 Main Street, the EPA is not convinced that the site might ever be used that way. The committee feels strongly that our Town needs to take every opportunity to make the point to EPA that we want to have the most thorough cleanup possible at the site, so that it can be used for residential or mixed use functions. We are starting by having the Town counsel write a letter to EPA to remind them of the residential use possibilities under the current zoning. CREW has also proposed changing the zoning to make residential uses even easier and they plan to submit an article to Town Meeting to that effect. The committee supports such action in principle, although we want to be sure that the planning board and other Town boards are comfortable with the changes. The committee feels that CREW has enough support in the Town to be successful with their effort to change the zoning, so that it is important to be involved in their process now. In this way, other Town boards can help craft the best possible language in whatever zoning change might be enacted.

Another important part of the cleanup this year was the removal of 3700 drums of uranium waste that were stored inside the Starmet buildings. As of March 2006, the drums and barrels were gone. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) contracted with Envirocare to package, transport, and dispose of the barrels and containers of depleted uranium waste. The drums and containers were packaged into special transport containers inside the building and then tested to be sure that no radiation or contamination got out of the transport package. The packaged drums were loaded into trucks and disposed of in Utah. The committee was particularly pleased with the close contact that the Concord Fire Department maintained with the contractors during this process. We felt that this attention contributed greatly to the safe completion of this waste removal. Currently, the DEP is using the leftover money in the budget to dispose of other chemicals and waste left in the building.

The committee has also been informed of EPA's plans to remove the buildings at the Starmet site. *De maximus* has been allowed into the buildings to evaluate what needs to be done. 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. In April, the committee expects that demolition plans will be released and can be finalized quickly. We would like to see flammable materials and electrical hazards removed from the buildings immediately, and we hope that the Concord Fire Department will be participating at the same high level that they participated at during the removals of buried drums in 2005 and stored drums in 2006.

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 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 and search for "Nuclear Metals".
- www.crewconcord.org is the website for the environmental advocacy group CREW.