



## **Citizens Advisory Group will talk with EPA, Great Lakes Bay community on how best to rid the area of dioxin contamination**

**By Barrie Barber | The Saginaw News**

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They span geographic, ethnic, gender and age groups. They come from government, business and environmental backgrounds.

A newly named 23-member Community Advisory Group will advise the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on dioxin contamination in the Saginaw Bay watershed.

"Sometimes the community is distrustful, and they think federal agencies are talking above them," said Donald de Blasio, an EPA community involvement coordinator in Chicago.

The hope is residents will accept the committee's role to listen to the public and the EPA and offer ways on how best to proceed with cleanup of dioxin contamination from Midland-based Dow Chemical Co.'s historical discharges into the Tittabawassee and Saginaw rivers.

The EPA, the state Department of Environmental Quality and Dow have reached a tentative settlement agreement. Public input on the plan will be accepted until mid-December.

Robert VanDeventer, Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce president, was one of six members on a steering committee that picked the members. Citizens Advisory Group meetings are open to the public, he said.

The group will convene for the first time in early December. Officials have not picked a time or place. "This approach is a really responsible approach by the EPA to set up a (Citizens Advisory Group) because it's a diverse group of people, not just special interests," said Laura Ogar, a member and the Bay County Environmental Affairs & Community Development director.

"In this region, certainly, we've seen it before: When we come together collectively, we can and we should be holding these agencies accountable."

She wants assurances, however, a remedial investigation on the extent of contamination in Saginaw Bay will end up in a settlement agreement. She's concerned a pending version doesn't include it. "It needs to be done right, but we need to be on a clear path to make that happen," she said.

DEQ spokesman Robert McCann said he anticipates the bay will be part of a settlement. "I can't say what exactly is going to happen in the bay, but it is going to be part of this process," he said.

The DEQ, meanwhile, hasn't determined if it will continue quarterly public meetings once the Citizens Advisory Group starts its sessions.

"If something major comes up, we'll schedule a meeting and talk to people about it," McCann said. "Otherwise, we'll do them as they are necessary. There will still be meetings. It's just not going to look the same as it used to, and the regularity might be different."

Former Midland Mayor R. Drummond Black, a group member, sees a role for public meetings while the

Citizens Advisory Group meets, also.

Like the others, he said he's still learning the committee's role. "The EPA does not run this group," he said. "I cannot imagine that this group would take over the communication that the EPA and the DEQ have to let people know what's going on."

Lone Tree Council spokeswoman and group member Michelle Hurd Riddick hopes the group won't rush a cleanup, which she fears is a possibility for those who want the lingering dioxin controversy behind the area soon.

"I would hope that the Community Advisory Group would advance a comprehensive, thorough cleanup," she said. "One of the things that I'm concerned about is people on the Community Advisory Group that want a quick cleanup."

She's also concerned that some of the other 46 applicants who wanted to serve on the panel won't have the chance. "I always think that's problematic that there's a process in place that rejects people who really want to serve their community," she said.

Van Deventer acknowledged some of the appointments caused pointed debate. The steering committee voted on each appointment.

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