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Legislators call for responsible dioxin strategy in Midland

LANSING – State and federal legislators are calling on the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to take a more responsible approach to dealing with dioxin levels in Midland.

Legislation in the state Senate and House calls on the DEQ to keep the action level for dioxin at the federal rate of 1,000 parts per trillion until there is compelling evidence that a reduction is necessary. Senate Bill 1276 and House Bill 5963 were introduced today.

“The health of our families and our neighbors has to be our primary concern” said state Sen. Tony Stamas, R-Midland. “This legislation is consistent with federal guidelines, which are based on measurable factors such as the health of the community. Decisions must be based on sound science.”

At a community meeting held Wednesday, the DEQ discussed with residents its plans to re-test Midland soils for levels of dioxin contamination. The DEQ’s dioxin action level for residential areas is 90 parts per trillion. Properties that test at levels higher than that would be labeled “facilities.” Properties not tested, but within areas expected to be contaminated, also would receive the label.

“Given what’s at stake in terms of the public health and economic health of Midland, we need to be cautious,” said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. “The DEQ should take into account health concerns that are based on real science and not just make an arbitrary decision without considering all the facts.”

The University of Michigan plans to launch a comprehensive health study on dioxin exposure in July. The study is expected to be completed in 18 to 24 months.

“Dioxin is not a new issue for those of us who live in Midland, who grew up here and who are raising our children here; and nothing is more important to us than protecting the safety and health of our families,” said U.S. Rep. Dave Camp, R-Midland. “We are all anxious to find out at what point excessive levels of dioxin become dangerous. However, the governor and her DEQ have no plan to answer that question – only a plan to dig up our yards and devalue our property. Scientists at the EPA are less than two years away from issuing updated dioxin regulations based on an exhaustive new study. We need to let these scientists complete their work, and we need to move forward with a comprehensive health study.”

State House Speaker Rick Johnson, R-Leroy, and state Rep. John Moolenaar, R-Midland, also urged a responsible approach to addressing dioxin in Midland.

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“Residents in this area have worked their entire lives to build homes and create a comfortable existence,” Johnson said. “We must make sure the DEQ doesn't unnecessarily threaten thousands of people's livelihoods by virtue of some questionable bureaucratic label.”

Moolenaar, a Midland resident, also expressed concern over the DEQ's aggressive plan and the long-term implications it could have on Midland.

“As a father raising six children here, I believe it is important to protect the public health of our families using good sound science and sound judgment. Enforcing the federal guidelines, with a health study guiding our efforts, is responsible and in the best interest of mid-Michigan,” Moolenaar said. “Implementing such an aggressive DEQ rule without the research to back it up has the potential to devastate our economy and the quality of life residents now enjoy.”

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