

Lone Tree Council

P.O. 1251, Bay City, Michigan 48706

(Fighting for environmental justice since 1978)

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(989) 799-3313
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CONTACT: Michelle Hurd Riddick

Sue Cameron 989-752-

Terry Miller 989-686-6386

CITIZENS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND SPORTS COMMUNITY PETITION FEDS FOR HEALTH REVIEW OF LOCAL WATER Effort is to Focus Attention on Saginaw River and Quicken Cleanup

Residents, fishermen, and environmentalists from the area are asking the federal government to look at contamination in the Saginaw River. The individuals and groups have petitioned the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a branch of the Centers for Disease Control. They are asking the agency to evaluate the health impacts coming from eating Saginaw River fish. Of most concern is the health effect on the children of both subsistence and recreational fishing families.

Sediment samples taken in 2004-2005 by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) show high concentrations of dioxin and furan compounds in the Saginaw River.

One of the environmental groups requesting the health consultation, Lone Tree Council, believes that the toxicity represented in the collected data on fish and sediments in the Saginaw River meet the criteria for a Petitioned Health Consultation, and that federal attention is sorely needed.

“The discovery of, and effort to address, high levels of dioxin contamination in the Tittabawassee River Flood Plain and in Midland, came after groups and individuals petitioned the ATSDR for a Health Consultation – it is time we put that same focus on the Saginaw River,” said Lone Tree’s Michelle Hurd Riddick,

The DEQ in a number of public meetings reported that the high levels of dioxins and furans found in the Tittabawassee River and Upper Saginaw River are making their way downstream and into the Saginaw Bay. The knowledge has prompted the present effort to bring attention to the impacts of this moving contamination to downstream communities.

“The Saginaw River outside my backdoor is an extension of the Tittabawassee River whose residents received a health consultation from ATSDR and we want one for our river too”, said Saginaw River resident Sue Cameron of Zilwaukee Twp.

Recreational fishermen have been vocal in their concern for eatable fish, and have weighed in on this most recent effort to draw attention to river pollution. .

“Residents of Michigan are entitled to fish with the expectation that their catch is healthy and safe. When that safety is called into question than it warrants being investigated for the protection of public health,” said fisherman and physician, Dr. Dave Gustdavisson.

Dave O’Dell an avid fisherman doesn’t permit his grandchildren to eat the fish from the river. “Here we are with some of the best fishing in the state and we can’t eat the fish safely and the fish warnings are posted. We need to know what the impacts are”

Citizens are concerned that without federal attention and accompanying remedial efforts to remove and/or treat those contaminants, little will happen. The chemical fingerprint for the Saginaw River contamination belongs to Dow Chemical of Midland and is the same chemical fingerprint found in the Tittabawassee River. Efforts to address the pollution since it was discovered in 2001 have floundered. DEQ efforts to require Dow to address the contamination have been met with political interference and disagreements with the responsible party over toxicity, investigative procedures, signage, and public information. Cleanup, to date, has not been addressed.

The need to evaluate and get advice on a specific public health issue related to human exposure to the contaminants in the river is what prompted the petition to ATSDR. “This God given source of protein (fish) should be accessible to everyone”, said Michelle Hurd Riddick of the Lone Tree Council. “Essentially this inexpensive food source has been contaminated. It’s a huge economic resource being denied the people of this watershed. There are documented subsistence fisherman and indigent people who rely on this fish to feed their families”.

For more information on the petition process go to:
<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/consult.html>