

Marjol air quality monitor, left unplugged, fails

BY CHARLES SCHILLINGER
STAFF WRITER

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An air monitor failed at the Marjol Battery property in Throop on Thursday morning, leaving no immediate data on whether lead-contaminated dust escaped downwind of the cleanup site, an official with monitoring group Advanced GeoServices said.

The contractor, SCE Environmental Group, began digging up and moving battery-casing material at the site for the first time Wednesday, the day prior to the air monitor failing. The two-year project includes moving lead-contaminated soil and battery casings to a central location to be encased in concrete.

The air monitor failed after workers with Advanced GeoServices did not properly switch the device from battery power to a corded connection overnight, officials acknowledged. Advanced GeoServices is the project monitoring group and represents the property owner, Gould Electronics.

The air monitor was one of three on site, but the only one downwind of the cleanup project. The devices monitor the air to ensure lead-contaminated dust is not leaving the site and entering the residential neighborhoods surrounding Marjol.

Throop Borough Councilman Ray Jarosh sat through a weekly Marjol meeting Thursday and said he was fairly certain there was no dust release.

"But how do I know? The monitor failed. I can't prove it," he said. "I am becoming more stressed about this project as it is going forward."

It is at least the third mistake during the cleanup. There were two incidents of miscommunication between the company and contractor in July and August, including one where 12,000 gallons of muddy water was released into a small tributary of Lackawanna River.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency could not be immediately reached for comment on Thursday morning's incident.

SCE Environmental stopped work at 7 p.m. Wednesday, according to Advanced GeoServices spokeswoman Lisa Ayers. She said backup batteries failed on the monitor at 12:42 a.m. Thursday and were not discovered until about 6 a.m., when workers began arriving.

"The ground was soaked before we left and still wet the next day," she said.

Mr. Jarosh said the backup system should have been in place.

"SCE, they did what they were supposed to and saturated the site (with water). The failure was on the monitoring group (Advanced GeoServices). They're the ones up there protecting my community. So yeah, I'm concerned," Mr. Jarosh added.

Ms. Ayers said the company has set up an additional monitor overnight to make sure downwind readings are taken.

"We will be taking every effort to see this doesn't happen again," she said.

There are other lead monitors the company has set up, but those do not provide real-time data. Ms. Ayers said those monitors were sent to a laboratory Thursday to make sure no dust escaped the site. Results are expected in several days.

Contact the writer: cschillinger@timeshamrock.com

