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LOCAL

City directs GRU to end contract with Koppers

The utility will now buy its poles from a plant in Georgia.

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Gainesville city officials have been among the most outspoken critics of the current federal mitigation plan for the Koppers-Cabot Superfund site, which they say does not go far enough to clean up contaminated groundwater and soil.

But, since 2002, the city's electric utility, Gainesville Regional Utilities, has maintained a contract to purchase poles from the Koppers, Inc., wood treatment plant, located near Northwest 23rd Avenue and North Main Street, approximately two miles southwest of the GRU public water system's Murphee Wellfield.

Thursday, Gainesville city commissioners directed GRU to stop buying poles from Koppers under a condition that allows either party to end the contract with 30 days notice.

City Commissioner Lauren Poe made the motion to "sever our relationship with Koppers." Several members of the public who live in the residential neighborhoods near Koppers criticized the city for maintaining the contract while simultaneously voicing concerns about the toxins that have polluted the site. Gainesville resident Cindy Harrington described the arrangement as "sleeping with the enemy."

In October, the Alachua County Commission sent letters to Florida Power and Light, Gainesville Regional Utilities and Clay Electric - utilities that contract with Koppers - requesting that they ask the company to stop treating the poles they purchase with chromated copper arsenate (CCA), which contains the carcinogen

arsenic. Because GRU had the contract with Koppers in place, Gainesville city commissioners decided not to send off a similar letter during a joint meeting with the County Commission, but referred the issue to staff.

GRU General Manager Bob Huntzinger said the utility would now purchase poles through an electric cooperative from a plant in Georgia.