

DuPont funded property cleanup could be finished by end of 2015

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CLARKSBURG — Property cleanup funded by DuPont as part of the Spelter smelter class action settlement may be finished by the end of 2015, Claims Administrator Edgar C. Gentle III said Thursday.

Meanwhile, the claims office has set three public meetings Sept. 29 to encourage more public participation in the second round of medical monitoring, according to Gentle.

DuPont agreed to pay millions of dollars for property cleanup in Spelter and nearby areas found to have been contaminated by arsenic, cadmium, lead and zinc, heavy metals common from the smelting of zinc. DuPont was one of the companies that owned and operated the Spelter smelter facility.

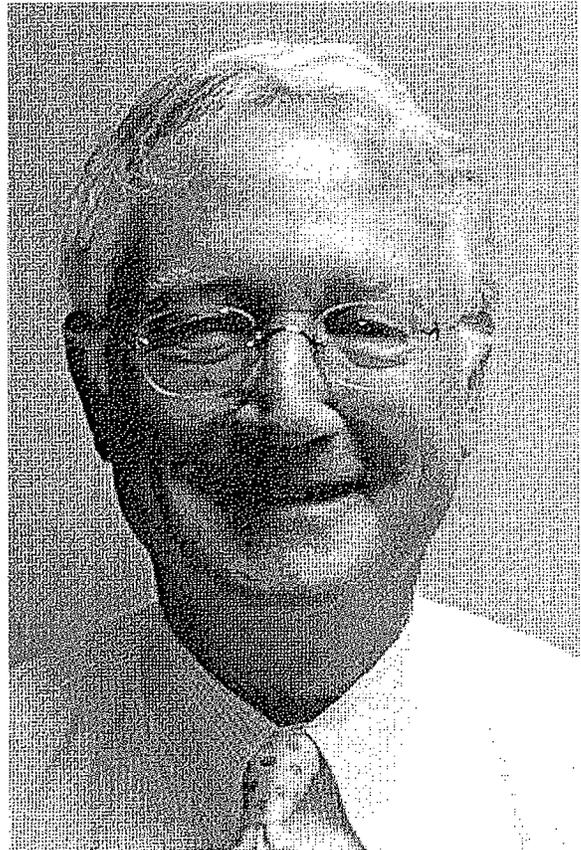
As part of the class action settlement, DuPont also agreed to pay for medical testing of residents still living within a certain radius of the plant or who had lived there.

Gentle said the crews working on cleanup hope to finish in Spelter — “the heart of the cleanup” — by later this year.

Crews hope to finish Erie early next year and will work on about 350 houses that are furthest away from the plant next year, as well, Gentle said.

“The toughest part for the soil remediation has been dealing with the weather,” said Michael A. Jacks, executive director of the claims office located in Spelter.

“We’ve had a couple wet summers, and it’s taken us longer than we thought just dealing with wet conditions,” Jacks said.



Claims Administrator Edgar C. Gentle III

Gentle, who lives and is based out of Alabama, noted that West Virginia's winters also have played a role: "After Halloween, it's been tough to plant sod."

Another issue for this project: "The land here is not very flat," said Gentle, who's also supervising a cleanup of a zinc smelter in Oklahoma.

It's not possible to remediate soil when the ratio of the slope is greater than 2-to-1, Gentle added.

The cleanup process started with testing, which identified property where heavy metal contaminants in the soil measured in the potentially dangerous zone, Gentle indicated.

At those sites, the top six inches of soil are being removed and replaced with new soil, with new sod put on top of that, Gentle said.

The process has included making sure residents can get in and out of their property, and the area, safely, Gentle added. And once cleanup is done in an area, the claims office then makes sure infrastructure such as roads are put back in good condition, Gentle said.

The budget for property cleanup was set at \$34 million by the presiding judge, Harrison County's Thomas A. Bedell.

As for medical monitoring, about 4,000 people signed up, receiving a cash stipend even if they didn't follow through with testing.

About 2,000 people participated in the first round of monitoring. This year, about 1,000 — or just 25 percent — have taken part in the second round, Gentle said.

The veteran claims administrator noted that it's been difficult to get medical monitoring participation at other projects, and added that it's even hard to get his family to follow through with preventative medical work.

But in a bid to get more people to participate, Gentle said public meetings are set for 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Sept. 29 at the Spelter fire station.

Jacks, Gentle and their assistant, Christy Mullins, also operate the claims office out of the fire department.

The office will stay open at least until property cleanup is complete. After that, Gentle, Jacks and the court will consider the economics of whether to maintain the office (medical monitoring is scheduled to last another 27 years).

Those with questions can contact Jacks, Gentle or Mullins at the office by calling (304) 622-7443.