

PCB cleanup will continue, opponents told

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Gov. James B. Hunt told leaders of the protest against the state's PCB landfill in Warren County Friday that the state would not halt its cleanup operation but would do everything to protect the residents' health and environment.

Hunt met with the protest leaders for about two hours after a shaky beginning. Members of the executive committee of Warren County Citizens Against PCB first had refused an offer to meet, saying they'd rather stage another protest at the landfill site and talk with Hunt next week.

They later reversed their position and agreed to the meeting, but neither side gave in much, said Hunt's press secretary, Gary Pearce.

Pearce said that at the outset of the meeting, Hunt told protest leaders he would not halt the dumping of PCB-contaminated soil in the landfill, despite the nearly three weeks of steady protest against it.

"They asked him again not to finish the dumping, but he told them 'No, we have no other option,'" Pearce said after the meeting.

Pearce said Hunt promised that the state would pursue detoxification of the landfill's contents "when and if it becomes feasible."

Hunt also told the group that the

state would monitor the landfill and wells within a three-mile radius of it and support any legislation to prohibit future landfills in Warren County.

Pearce was the only person in the meeting who would disclose what was discussed. Protest leaders said they wanted to discuss the meeting privately before commenting.

"We'd like to go tell the people in Warren County first and then let the media know," said Jim Ward, vice president of the group.

Ward was one of six members of the protest group's executive committee to attend the meeting. The Rev. Leon White, North Carolina director of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, and the Rev. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, also attended.

A total of 507 arrests have been made since the protest against the landfill began Sept. 15. The protesters claim the landfill will leak and that the site was chosen because the county is predominantly black and without political influence.

The state maintains that the landfill was the most economical way to clean up the spill and that Warren County was chosen because it best fit the need for suitable soil and available land. They

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deny race was a factor in the decision to locate the facility there.

The soil, contaminated when PCB-laced oil was illegally dumped along roadsides in 14 counties in 1978, is being scraped from more than 200 miles of rural

roads, and nearly 14 miles of roadway at Fort Bragg.

Thus far, 231.2 miles of contaminated soil has been removed and the cleanup operation appears to be headed into its final week, although it was suspended Friday for the meeting between Hunt and the protest leaders.