

EPA urges Hebert

By KATHY GRAY
Daily News staff writer

The Environmental Protection Agency has asked a local environmentalist to act responsibly when making allegations against public agencies and the Dow Chemical Co.

In a nine-page letter to Environmental Congress of Mid-Michigan director Diane Herbert, the EPA responded to an April letter from Herbert and outlined 10 instances in which her information concerning the dioxin issue was either false or misleading.

The letter was copied to 14 other individuals and agencies, including Gov. James Blanchard, U.S. Senators, congressmen, local officials, and officials of the Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Public Health, state attorney general's office, and the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control.

"At the outset let me express my disappointment in the number of inaccurate allegations contained in your letter," the letter, which was signed by acting Regional V administrator Alan Levin, said. "The

situation in Midland is complex and many of the issues are emotionally charged. It is, therefore, incumbent on all parties to act responsibly and to engage in a dialogue based on facts."

The EPA responded to 10 issues contained in Herbert's letter, five of which dealt with the EPA's sampling of soils for the presence of dioxin both inside and outside the Dow Chemical plant. In at least one claim, Hebert alleges Dow unfairly influenced the sampling survey.

"I am particularly disturbed by your implications regarding this Agency's integrity in this matter," Levin wrote. "Dow Chemical did not and will not influence the studies we are undertaking in Midland. Their cooperation has been sought and has proved helpful. We have, however, as an Agency carried out our mission uncompromised and in the public interest."

In addition to soil sampling, Levin told Herbert that the EPA is conducting sampling from water, wastewater, fish and river sediment and incinerator and ambient air.

to 'act responsibly'

Herbert also claimed that the EPA is not adequately protecting the public health; is not concerned about groundwater contamination; hasn't released information from previous studies; and should work with the Center for Disease Control to conduct broad studies looking at alleged health problems in Midland.

The EPA responded by saying current data doesn't warrant emergency action concerning possible groundwater contamination. "But the possibility of groundwater contamination is a major concern of this Agency."

Results from previous studies, the letter stated, will be released when data from current studies is compiled and added to previous reports. Health studies aren't warranted, according to an attached letter from the CDC, because the occurrence of cleft palates, allegedly linked to dioxin contamination, has been low since 1975.

Herbert also said congress should investigate the EPA's lack of action in Midland.

"Region V's record in Midland over the past two years and before has been characterized by high professional standards. We are perfectly willing, at any time, to have our records reviewed by Congress or the public," EPA officials responded.

Herbert has not responded to the letter yet, but said "I laughed when I got it."

She stands by the allegations made in her letter and hopes a requested congressional investigation will shed light on the claims she has made against the EPA.

"Their answers (to the claims in her original letter) are outrageous and deficient," she said. "I think now they just want me to go away."

EPA's director of public affairs Jon Grand said Thursday the agency is willing to work with Herbert, but "we would prefer to work with the real issues instead of the peripheral or smoke screens.

"This is not an attempt to close off dialogue," he added. "Whether they are the right answers depends on where you sit on these issues."