

The News and Observer

Tuesday, September 21, 1982, r

This newspaper's opinion

Afton dump no 'Love Canal'

Mrs. Lois Gibbs of Niagara Falls, N.Y., has stepped out-of-bounds by linking her neighborhood's Love Canal problems and Warren County's concerns over a PCB landfill. The differences between the two sites and their methods of toxic-waste disposal are so different that she is playing with the emotions of North Carolinians rather than dealing with the facts.

Mrs. Gibbs helped to organize protests and legal action against Love Canal — and for good reason. But, she engaged in reckless overstatements when she told protesters: "Ten years from now, you'll be the recipients of cancer and sickness. Your dump's not that different from Love Canal, except that you have the ability to stop it."

Not that different? Come now, Mrs. Gibbs. The landfill site near Afton has been so carefully prepared that, if anything, it overcompensates for safety. In Niagara Falls, a chemical company dumped many kinds of toxic wastes at a site that was neither suitable nor carefully prepared. Unlike the Afton landfill, Love Canal was in a residential neighborhood and no monitoring was used to protect people and property from its toxic contents.

Other contrasts between the two sites are dramatic. The dumped dirt at Afton contains a single chemical, PCB, to which activated carbon was applied long ago to prevent it from migrating into plants and water. The site is lined with both six feet of compacted clay and a plastic liner. It will be buffered by acreage that will keep human activities from encroaching on it. Finally, after the dump has been capped and sealed, the state will monitor it regularly for leakage and for any potential danger to humans and the environment.

Mrs. Gibbs does a disservice to North Carolinians, in suggesting that unlawful conduct by protesters is merely an assertion of constitutional rights. What the Niagara Falls visitor ignores is that the disposal of PCB-tainted dirt in this landfill has come about through the legal processes that keep the Constitution from being just a worthless piece of paper. That Constitution guarantees Mrs. Gibbs the right to speak her piece in Warren County, but it does not guarantee that she 1) will make sense, 2) will provide a suitable alternative to the landfill or 3) will not do more harm than good by her pronouncements.