News and Observer

State expected to end cleanup of PCBs today

From Staff and Wire Reports

Opponents of the state's PCB landfill in Warren County continued their trek to Raleigh Monday, just as state officials announced that the cleanup operation should be completed today, nearly two weeks ahead of schedule.

About 30 people on a 55-mile protest march to the capital entered Wake County late Monday afternoon. They planned to spend the night at St. Matthews A.M.E. Zion Church in downtown Raleigh and rally today at the Capitol.

The Rev. Leon White, field director of the Raleigh office of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice and leader of the march from Afton, said Monday opponents of the landfill would keep fighting to have the facility moved to another location.

"We are prepared morally and financially to continue the struggle as long as it takes," White said.

William W. Phillips, assistant to the secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety, said as of Monday evening, the state had cleaned up 237.8 miles of the estimated 243 miles of contaminated soil. The cleanup operation should end today, he added.

But Phillips said the landfill site would continue to receive contaminated soil from Fort Bragg through this week and most of next week. That operation is being conducted by a private contractor under an agreement with the federal government.

Meanwhile, two attorneys representing three couples who live near the landfill said they are seeking a temporary restraining order to bar trucks carrying the contaminated soil from using rural roads near the site.

They filed a lawsuit in Warren County Superior Court Friday alleging that weight limits for the roads were improperly increased by the state.

Superior Court Judge Arthur L. Lane of Fayetteville was asked to issue the restraining order Monday, but he told the attorneys he could not make a decision on their request until today.

Opponents have demonstrated daily since the trucks started rolling Sept. 15, claiming the landfill endangers the health of Warren County residents despite state and federal assurances that the landfill is safe. There have been 507 arrests in connection with the protests, most for impeding traffic near the landfill.

PCB, or polychlorinated biphenyls, were contained in transformer oil that was illegally dumped on state highways in 1978. The chemicals have caused cancer in laboratory animals that received them in their diets.

Gov. James B. Hunt Jr. met with about 10 people representing the PCB opponents Friday and assured the group he would work to ensure the landfill's safety. Among other things, Hunt pledged to work for detoxification of the site as soon as necessary technology was available.

After the meeting, White and other leaders returned to Warren County to discuss Hunt's assurances with other landfill opponents. Ken Ferruccio, leader of the Warren County Citizens Concerned about PCB, said most of the opponents decided to keep fighting for removal of the facility from the county.

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