

Park Hill residents demand answers over Black Leaf chemicals



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Park Hill residents demand answers at a public meeting Thursday that addressed the issue of dangerous chemicals from the former Black Leaf chemical plant.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -

Residents in the Park Hill area said lead, arsenic and other dangerous chemicals are seeping into the soil outside their homes.

On Thursday, dozens of homeowners demanded more answers from those investigating the toxic hazard at a public meeting held on the topic.

The meeting was set up by Metro Councilman David James as an attempt for residents to get more information on the ground beneath them.

Many weren't satisfied with the answers they got and they showed it.

"I'm here because of poisonous materials, this place is right in behind my home," said Denise Dickerson, whose home borders the Black Leaf Chemical site.

Black Leaf is a former pesticide manufacturing facility in the Park Hill neighborhood that ceased production in the 1970s.

Government officials told residents at a meeting Thursday night that it left a nasty legacy behind -- soil that the Environmental Protection Agency said is contaminated.

"These are some heavy poisonings. You're talking arsenic, lead, some of these I can't even name," said Dickerson.

Earlier this year, experts took samples from the Black Leaf site and from more than 50 properties nearby.

"All locations had at least one hazardous substance above a regional screening level, so that was a little surprising," said Art Smith with the EPA.

"It's very disturbing. I think about my garden. I have food, tomatoes, greens that I've eaten from that," said Dickerson.

Despite the findings, the EPA insists there is no emergency.

"No one is at immediate health risk due to the concentrations that we've discovered," said Smith.

Most in attendance weren't satisfied with that assurance, and are more concerned with possible damage already done.

Several residents showed frustration, particularly with the slow pace of the investigation, which began in October 2010, and still has no clear outcome.

"With respect to whether it is going to get cleaned up and when, we don't have enough answers to that at this time," said Smith.

Even the answers some residents were provided with were met with uncertainty.

"I'm just a little skeptical of taking the word of really anybody," said Dickerson.

Officials said they've already put in storm water control measures to try to contain some of the runoff from rain, which is suspected of spreading those contaminants from the plant site to nearby homes.

The next step in the process is more extensive soil sampling.

A few residents mentioned that they're going to start looking for attorneys.

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