



Forward Township residents want session with state DEP

By Chris Buckley
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FORWARD TOWNSHIP - A group of township residents has requested a meeting with the state department of Environmental Protection before the final clean-up of a fly ash slide begins.

On Monday, DEP Secretary Kathleen McGinty came to Forward Township to announce a \$500,000 state commitment to complete the clean-up. The project, expected to begin next week, would include removing the remaining ash, adding gravel to a depth of four feet to improve drainage and restructuring the hillside. The money will come from the state Solid Waste Abatement Fund.

The slide initially occurred Jan. 25 when the ground broke loose and water, slurry and tree branches rushed down the hill onto Rostosky Ridge Road, located just off Route 136.

Some water and debris from the slide spilled onto Route 136 near Rapp's Restaurant.

But in a release, Pittsburgh attorney Peter M. Villari said "multiple" township residents affected by the slide have ongoing safety concerns.

"There has been no communication with affected residents other than DEP's Sept. 26 news release," Villari, said. "All we know about DEP's planned cleanup is what is described in the news release. Unfortunately, DEP has consistently employed this method of communication with those affected since the landslide occurred nine months ago.

"In fact, DEP has, with limited exception, failed to assist residents in determining the source of the fly ash and what caused the landslide in the first place."

Villari said his clients are asking DEP officials and the agency's contractor to meet with them to detail the planned clean-up, answer questions and address safety concerns.

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Villari said the cleanup plan, as described in the news release, is too vague to allay the residents' fears that the cleanup plan would generate even more airborne fly ash and that buried fly ash would leach into the groundwater supply. He said the design plans, work plans, contractor qualifications and engineer credentials, must be provided to the residents before work begins.

"We want these materials reviewed by our environmental scientists to ascertain that DEP's work plan is 100 percent safe both during and after cleanup," Villari said. "If our environmental scientists think the work plan jeopardizes residents' safety in any way, shape or form, we want DEP to take corrective action before work begins."

The Allegheny County Health Department reported Monday that samples collected by an air monitoring device on a property along Rostosky Ridge Road found no significant human exposure to arsenic.

But Villari said recent testing in the area, conducted by environmental scientists retained on behalf of the residents, revealed that concentrations of arsenic in the soil and ambient air continue to exceed safe levels.

"In fact, the reputation and credentials of our scientists, who have been hired by DEP in the past, certainly cannot be questioned by DEP," Villari said. "We want to make absolutely certain that before any additional work is done, the residents are not at any risk for additional exposure."

Villari said the residents are pleased that DEP has devised a plan to address the countless tons of fly ash that remain, but added that they believe it is unstable and could cause another slide.

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