

# Taking action to protect our water supply

The recent 10,000 gallon chemical spill into the Elk River in West Virginia, affecting the water supply of 300,000 people, should cause every one of us to pause and appreciate our own vulnerable water supply.

Springfield and Clark County residents have one of the cleanest and most productive water aquifers in the entire United States. While 82,000 people in Clark County depend on this aquifer, it is part of the larger sole source Great Miami Aquifer on which hundreds of thousands of people depend. The unsettling news is that it is at risk. The good news is that, unlike the people in West Virginia, we can still do something about it.

For decades private water wells in the Charleston, West Virginia, area were contaminated by coal industry operations. During that time most people, many of whom worked for the same coal industry, sat on the sidelines and said nothing, unless it was their well that had “gone bad”. Eventually, enough wells were contaminated in a nine county area that everyone had to be incorporated into a locally operated water supply. Unfortunately, the recent chemical spill happened upstream of the water intake for that water system. The result? No one had safe water to drink or even bathe. People had to travel for miles to find bottled water and are now asking, “How did we let this happen?”

Our Springfield well field has supplied us with clean, safe drinking water for generations, but it is in danger of being contaminated. Some of the groundwater supplying our well field flows directly below the Tremont City Barrel Fill. That site now holds 51,500 55-gallon barrels containing an estimated 3 million gallons of hazardous waste, buried there in the late ‘70’s.

At the time this was an “accepted” practice for the disposal of hazardous wastes. We now know that barrels disintegrate and hazardous wastes migrate, and our water supply is at risk. In 2002 the US EPA named the Tremont Barrel Fill site a Superfund Alternate Site, designating the wastes contained therein as a threat to local citizens’ health and the environment. In 2010 the US EPA proposed cleanup Plan 4a which would have removed all hazardous wastes from the site. The total cost of the cleanup would be borne by corporations responsible for the Barrel Fill’s contents back in the ‘70’s.

Then in 2011, the US EPA announced a different “final plan” for the cleanup. The liquid hazardous wastes would be removed, but thousands of barrels containing semi-solid hazardous wastes would be crushed, then reburied onsite. This procedure does not meet today’s US EPA requirements for the safe disposal of hazardous wastes.

We citizens cannot accept this plan because it jeopardizes the safety of our water supply in the long term. Local officials including Springfield City and Clark County Commissioners, the Clark County Combined Health District, and German Township Trustees, and the Ohio EPA are unanimous in their opposition to hazardous wastes remaining onsite and have called strenuously for full removal of all onsite hazardous wastes. Additionally, Rep. Boehner and Senators Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman have spoken out on our behalf.

With the possibility that the hazardous wastes from the Tremont Barrel Fill could someday reach our well field and its sole source aquifer and cause a much larger and longer term problem than the people of West Virginia now face, ask yourself this question: Are you willing to sit on the sidelines until the problem is out of control, and you and your family need to find bottled water to drink, water your animals, and bathe on an ongoing basis?

We need a lot more citizens in this game. It’s time to speak out to prevent a similar but much longer term catastrophe from happening. Or we will find ourselves asking “How did we let this happen?”

Marilyn Welker

President, People for Safe Water