

Agencies sue Sparton, Inc.

3 lawsuits demand proper clean-up

By Jeff Buell
Observer staff writer

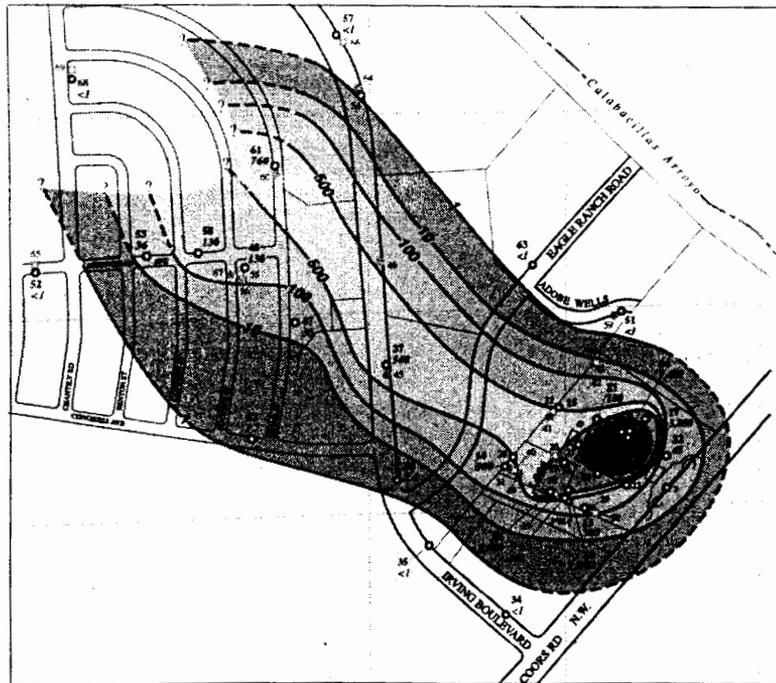
Sparton Technology, Inc. is facing some high-powered entities after six different governmental agencies filed lawsuits against the company Wednesday morning.

Three separate complaints were filed in federal court Wednesday. The City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County joined forces to file the first. The State Department of Environment and the New Mexico Office of Natural Resources filed the second complaint and the U.S. Department of Justice teamed up with the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to file the third complaint.

Sparton has been involved in an ongoing dispute with the EPA over clean-up procedures to take care of a large plume of contaminants that have seeped into the water table.

Sparton is an electronics manufacturer that operated at a plant on Coors Road near Irving Boulevard from the early 1960s until 1994. Up until the early 1980s, the plant dumped chemical solvents — used in the manufacture of electronic switches for nuclear weapons — into the ground surrounding the plant.

"They were dumping solvents into a hole in the ground," said Gary

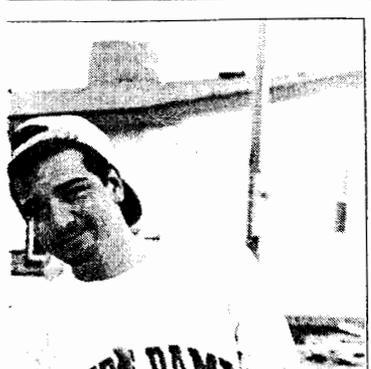


Press conference — Speaking on the Sparton lawsuit Wednesday were from left, Mayor Martir Chavez, Sen. Joe Carraro, Attorney General Tom Udall, Ed Kelley of the city's department of water and wastewater, City Councilor Alan Armijo and Bill Turner of the New Mexico Office of Natural Resources.

Left, the shaded area in illustration shows the approximate area of the contaminated plume.

(Observer—Rojcewicz photo)

Please see Sparton page A-2



RRPS language arts curriculum up for vote

By Genie Blair Ryan
Observer staff writer

Final adoption of the Rio Rancho Public Schools language arts curriculum is scheduled for the Monday

The standards that will be presented at Monday's meeting, Gibson said, "define what students should know and be able to do at each grade level."

Copies of the Language Arts Standards will be

Sparton

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O'Dea of the Albuquerque city attorney's office.

The plume contains toxins that are known carcinogens. At some points, toxic levels from water samples have exceeded safe drinking water standards 300 times.

A press conference was held on a hillside above part of the plume Wednesday afternoon. Mayor Martin Chavez, Sen. Joe Carraro, City Councilor Alan Armijo and Attorney General Tom Udall all spoke against Sparton Technology.

"I am very disappointed as mayor that Sparton has dragged their feet," said Chavez. According to Chavez, the plume represents Albuquerque's most severe contamination site, and the state's fifth most severe.

"The plume of contamination is spreading," said Chavez. "If we do nothing, it is going to get worse."

Officials said no drinking water is currently contaminated. "There's not an immediate threat to water being consumed right now," said Norman Wade of the state Environment

Department.

But, he said, the threat to the metropolitan area's water supply is great. The plume is near a recharge area, the Calabacillas Arroyo and threatens to enter the aquifer. Even water supplies in Rio Rancho could eventually be affected.

In a prepared statement released by Sparton Technology Wednesday, the company said, "it is essential for citizens to know that Sparton Technology has spent more than \$6 million to date on analysis and remediation efforts to correct the contaminated groundwater that resulted from the operation of our Coors Road facility between 1961 and 1983."

The statement said Sparton is willing to spend more money to implement a solution, but the solution must be "workable and affordable."

"Unfortunately, while Sparton Technology has proposed and is willing to start such a solution (the governmental agencies) are not."

The statement further claims that Sparton adhered to all applicable laws and regulations in place at the time of the initial contamination.

"Sparton has been neither reluctant nor resistant to accept its responsibility to correct the contamination," the company stated.

The EPA last June outlined a clean-up plan for Sparton to follow. To implement the plan it would cost the company as much as \$26 million over the next 30 years.

Sparton called the EPA plan "unreasonable and too costly," according to chairman John J. Smith.

After several months of unsuccessful negotiations between Sparton and the EPA over the clean-up plan, Sparton filed a lawsuit alleging the clean-up plan was "no more protective of human health or the environment than Sparton's response, yet is significantly more costly." The lawsuit accuses the EPA's decision of being "arbitrary and capricious, an abuse of discretion" and improperly based on political considerations.

The contamination plume currently extends about one-half mile to the northwest of the Sparton site. It is estimated to be spreading at a rate of approximately 100 feet per year.



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Murder

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said Gonzales Sr. had approached her son about killing the state's witness for \$10,000 and she was afraid her son would do it because he told her. "\$10,000 is a lot of money."

The boy left the house soon after, and his mother was worried that he was going to do what Gonzales had asked, Rivera said. When he came back, the teen was persuaded to tell the police the story.

He said Gonzales and Duncan's daughter Heidi drove up to him in Bernalillo and Gonzales asked to

buy crack cocaine. The boy refused and Gonzales "got crazy," Rivera said, telling the boy he had just gotten out of jail and "If you don't sell it to me, I'll kick your ass and take it."

The boy then told Gonzales that he was related to him (Rivera said the boy is the father of Gonzales' nephew). Then Gonzales allegedly asked the boy if he knew who the state witness was. When the teen said he did, Gonzales said, "That's the one who got us locked up. If you stick him for me, I'll pay you \$10,000."

Rivera said detectives asked the teen if he thought Gonzales was serious and the boy replied, "I know

he was serious." Rivera said he had received reports before that the state witness "was in jeopardy." The sheriff's department keeps the witness under protective observation, he added.

Gonzales was to appear in district court Thursday for a hearing to revoke his release on bond, Rivera said. The results of the hearing were not available at press time.

No trial date has been set for the Gonzaleses, Rivera said.

Heroes

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Because of the remote location of the fire, Anderson said the three men's assistance was critical. Had the three not helped out, "The potential for a tragedy of life and property would have been high," said Anderson. "I would say it would have been a very dismal outcome."

Anderson said the fire was caused by a cardboard box filled with ashes

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