

Officials shed light on site proposal

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City and county officials as well as two local state legislators were among the 130 people at a public information meeting Tuesday night to inform area residents about a proposed hazardous waste management facility for eastern Chaves County.

Gandy Marley, Inc., a Tatum-based company, has proposed to build Triassic Park, a hazardous waste treatment, storage and disposal facility, on a 480-acre site about 43 miles east of Roswell and two miles south of U.S. 380.

The evening gathering at the Best Western Sally Port Inn heard from all aspects of the project — from an in depth technical overview to an explanation of the permit process — at this first of three public meetings scheduled throughout eastern New Mexico this week.

Darwin Pattengale, New Mexico Environment Department District 4 manager and meeting facilitator, opened the meeting by stating its purpose was to “engage in open and honest discussion” about the proposed project.

James Bearzi, chief of the Hazardous Waste Bureau of NMED, also stressed the meeting was hosted solely by GMI as a means of “getting all the information out there in frank and open discussion.”

Bearzi said that the meeting was not required by law, but that GMI chose to have it so that the public could get factual information.

Patrick Corser, GMI’s engineering consultant with the Colorado-based Montgomery Watson engineering firm, provided a project overview which included a description of site conditions, facility operations and containment and environmental monitoring systems.

Corser said the facility would be located in a favorable geologic, hydrologic and climatic setting. He said extensive drilling in the area has confirmed that there is no water in the tight, unfractured Triassic clays that extend more than 600 feet beneath the proposed site.

Also, he said, U.S. Geological Survey data shows the area’s structural stability, with no faulting or cracking, makes it the quietest in the state in terms of earthquakes.

He said the facility would operate as a treatment, storage and disposal facility, which, he said, would be the only TSD facility in the state. He added there are 14 others in adjoining and other western states, all with clean safety records.

The TSD facility would have areas to test, clean and handle incoming waste and to solidify any liquids before they go into the disposal site. The disposal sites are designed in three phases, with only a portion of the first phase included in the current draft permit.

According to Ken Schultz, government affairs representative for GMI, the Gandy and Marley families are fifth and sixth generation New Mexicans, and, therefore, have approached the project with the health and welfare of the state in mind.

“We feel (the facility) will save the environment and help protect it from illegal disposal of hazardous wastes,” he said.

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As part of that concern, GMI has considered carefully the use of water in the project's operations.

Corser said a water storage tank will be required on site and that GMI will purchase water rights and truck water in daily. He also said monitor wells will be drilled and maintained all around the site.

Steve Pullen, project manager of the NMED Permits Program, said the public comment period will end Aug. 15 and that, although his office has received a number of requests for hearings, none of them have met the specific requirements yet as set forth by the NMED Permits Program.

He clarified those requirements and added that, if a valid request is received, NMED already has set Oct. 14 as a hearing date in Roswell.

He also said the current draft permit can be viewed at the Roswell Public Library or on the Internet at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/hwb/hazwaste_home.html.

At press time, a question-and-answer session was beginning.