

Controversy about overseer for Jersey City chromium cleanup

by Amy Sara Clark

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Journal File Photo Jersey City wants W. Michael McCabe to oversee the cleanup of this 16-acre site on Garfield Avenue.

Jersey City is asking a former deputy administrator for the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** under President Bill Clinton to oversee the cleanup of a chromium site in Jersey City.

But while community and environmental groups praise W. Michael McCabe's experience, they are criticizing the cleanup plan he would manage.

"We're pleased that someone with this background, knowledge and passion is considering overseeing this remediation," **Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy** said about McCabe, who would monitor the cleanup of a 16-acre site along Garfield Avenue.

The site, owned by **PPG Industries**, once housed a factory that produced hexavalent chromium, which can cause cancer, respiratory problems and organ damage. McCabe recently led the Obama transition team's committee on environmental appointments and also headed the EPA's Mid-Atlantic Region.

"I'm leaning toward it," McCabe said in an interview Monday about taking on the job. But he wants to see how much community support there is for the cleanup plan.

"If you have a community that is not supportive, that feels like its concerns have not been heard, it makes it very difficult to go forward and complete a project," he said.

And community groups have raised eyebrows about a settlement agreement between the city and PPG.

"I guess our feeling is that a resume is no substitute for a (detailed) cleanup agreement," said Joe Morris, an organizer for **Interfaith Community Organization**, a Hoboken-based group that last month filed its own lawsuit against PPG in federal court.

Nancy Marks, senior attorney for the National Resources Defense Council, which joined ICO in the federal lawsuit, agreed.

"There's no schedule, there's no standards, it's a proposed structure for devising a cleanup plan. But it's not a cleanup plan," she said.

After praising McCabe, as well as Mayor Healy and the state DEP for pushing for a settlement, Stuart Lieberman, an attorney for the neighborhood group GRACO, said the settlement needs a stricter timeline, provisions for medical monitoring for area residents exposed to the chromium and greater decision making power for the site administrator. Bill Matsikoudis, the city's top attorney, defended the settlement. "We look forward to hearing recommendations during the comment period," he said. "However, we believe that it provides the best mechanism for (a) thorough and expeditious remediation."

The plan is available online at www.nj.gov/oag/newsreleases09/pr20090219b-PPG-Consent-Judgment.pdf.

The public can submit comments through April 15 to Thomas Cozzi at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, P.O. Box 028, Trenton, NJ 08625, or at a public meeting on Monday, March 30 at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 280 Grove St. After the public comment period, city officials will amend the plan as needed and present it to the City Council for a vote.

The agreement, including McCabe's appointment, would go to Hudson County Superior Court for approval.