

DuPont site to be tested for uranium

By JENNIFER BYRNE
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PENNSVILLE TWP. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be testing the DuPont Chambers Works facility for latent uranium used at the plant in the 1940s as part of the Manhattan Project.

Spokesman Rich Chlan said the testing will be part of the Formerly Utilized

Sites Remedial Action Program, which was created by the federal Department of Energy in 1974. FUSRAP was established to address radiological contamination at sites used by two of the DOE's predecessor agencies, the Manhattan Engineer District and the Atomic Energy Commission from the 1940s through the 1960s.

Chlan said it was 1942 when operations at the plant first involved the use of uranium as part of the Manhattan

Project — the U.S. effort during World War II to produce the atomic bomb — with related work continuing until late 1947. Sparked by refugee physicists in the United States, the program was organized slowly after nuclear fission was discovered by German scientists in 1938. Many U.S. scientists feared German dictator Adolf Hitler would attempt to build a fission bomb.

In 1948 and 1949, the AEC conducted radiological surveys and decontami-

nation of building surfaces at the site. The commission released the buildings back to DuPont in 1949, and the plant was designated a FUSRAP site by the DOE in 1980.

In 1997, FUSRAP was transferred by Congress from the DOE to the Army Corps of Engineers. At this time, Congress directed that the Corps conduct FUSRAP activities in accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability

Act guidelines.

Chlan said previous tests of DuPont Chambers Works indicated that the level of uranium residue there was very low.

"We seem to be dealing with a very low concentration," he said. "If it should warrant a clean-up, we will bring it into compliance."

Chlan said the actual testing has not yet taken place, adding that the Corps

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is currently focusing on working with the community. He said a public relations coordinator, Sandra Schaloux, has been hired, and a public meeting will be held soon to explain the situation to residents.

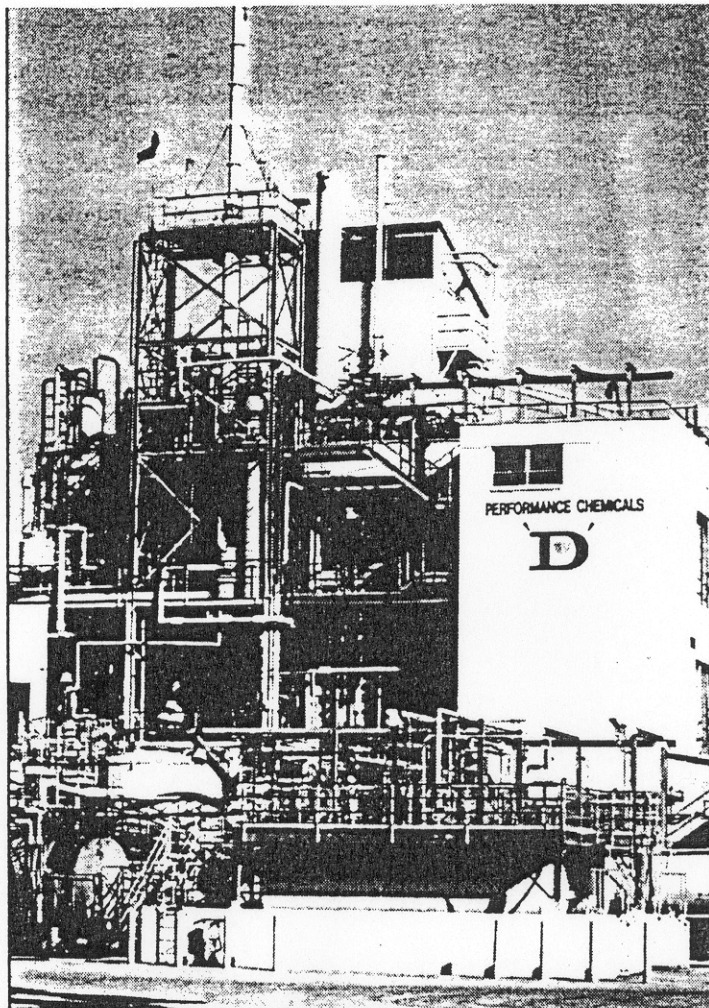
"It's really in the planning stages right now," he said. "But basically we want to identify a cross-section of the population, see how important this is to them. We want a lot of public involvement."

Although Chlan couldn't specify how the tests would be conducted, he said similar tests are usually done by taking soil samples and drilling core samples. He said former tests suggest there is little reason for concern.

"As I said, the information we have indicates that there is a low concentration of radiation on the site," he said.

Leslie Cormier, spokeswoman for DuPont Chambers Works, said the FUSRAP testing has been part of a continuing project. The main difference is that this project is now headed by the Corps rather than the DOE.

"This is part of an ongoing investigation," she said. "There is no immediate threat to human health."



Sunbeam file photo

The Performance Chemicals "D" Building is located on the DuPont Chambers Works site located in the Deepwater section of Pennsville Township.