

# Dying to KNOW

BELDEN CENTER  
ASSESSES THE RISKS

## Many neighborhoods are near dumps

**500 EF DANGER:** More than half the waste disposal sites in Niagara County are considered significant health and environmental risks. FRONT PAGE

By Teresa Hoshell  
and Mike Kurilovitch

Niagara Gazette

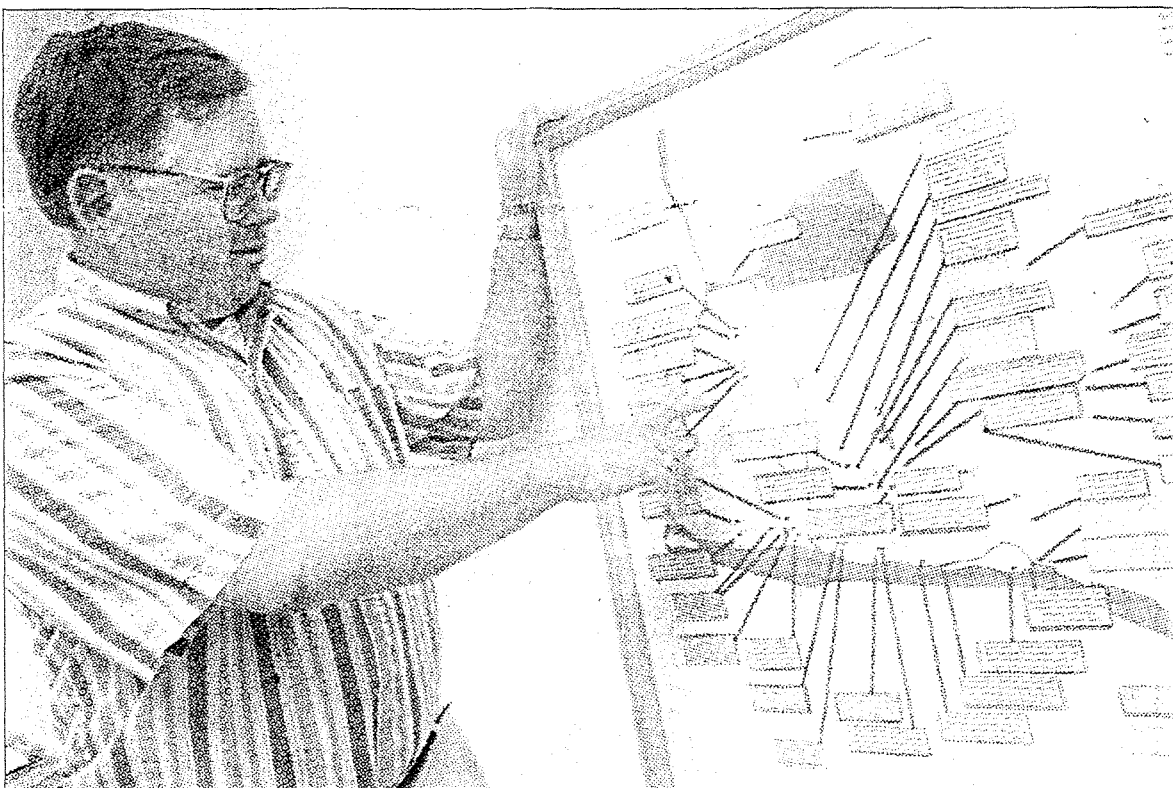
How safe is your neighborhood? Before answering that question, consider that Belden Center is just one of several residential areas in Niagara County next to waste disposal sites that pose health and environmental risks, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Niagara County has the second highest number of inactive waste disposal sites (59) in a two-region area that includes 17 counties in Western and Central New York, second only to Erie County with 61 sites, according to DEC reports.

Of the 59 identified sites, 25 are rated "Class 2" sites, defined as a "significant threat to the public health or environment" requiring cleanup, DEC documents state.

"A 'Class 2' means we have to do something. Residents should be concerned. But if there was a threat or harm, the Health Department is involved, and we would get people moved out," said Michael J. Hinton, an environmental engineer with the DEC's Division of Hazardous Waste Remediation. "That's why the Health Department is a partner in this. If it's significant enough to affect neighbors, we get involved

Please see **Dump sites, 8A**



Dan Cappellazzo/Niagara Gazette

**MANY EXAMPLES:** Michael Hinton of the Department of Environmental Conservation's Buffalo office points out the Belden Center area on a map, which shows many dump sites in the city of Niagara Falls.

### ABOUT THIS SERIES

Some Belden Center residents have been living with illnesses and the fear that dump sites near the neighborhood could be the cause. Reporters Mike Kurilovitch and Teresa Hoshell explore residents' concerns in this three-day series.

#### Sunday

✓ Belden Center residents describe illnesses they and their neighbors have suffered.

✓ Robert Olszewski organized residents into a group called CAPE.

#### Monday

✓ Not all the residents of Belden Center fear for their health. In fact, some fear that hysteria could hurt their property values.

#### Today

✓ Belden Center isn't the only residential area in the county that has dump sites for neighbors. **1A**

# Dump sites exist near many residential neighborhoods

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and take some action."

Six of the 59 county sites are rated "2a," a rating given to sites not yet classified, pending the collection of additional data, Hinton said.

"It's very common that these sites are located next to residential neighborhoods," Hinton said.

That's disturbing, said Niagara County Legislator Wayne Lenhart, D-North Tonawanda, chairman of the county's Environmental Services and Parks Committee.

"If we have 25 hazardous waste sites, then it's going to take a joint effort between all branches of government to clean them up," Lenhart said.

Cleaning the sites could take several years, Hinton said. But it needs to be done.

"I still own a house on 'Rhode Island Avenue' in the Belden Center neighborhood, said Fred Curtis, a former resident who now lives in Lockport. "I'm concerned that there is a dump site there. I worry about property values, but I'm definitely more concerned about people's health.

"I know there are no liners on any of those pits out there. They just dug 'em and covered 'em over. There's nothing to stop the seepage. I don't really care about property values when compared to people's health."

Knowing where a potential hazardous site is located is only one small step in a series of steps to uncovering an environmental risk, Hinton said. The process continues with an investigation of the site, and that takes at least two years, Hinton said.

Several more years may pass before environmental and health officials are able to negotiate with the responsible company or companies and begin the actual cleanup process, Hinton said.

That means residents living near those sites are exposed to the "significant threat to the public health or environment" for however many years it takes to clean up the site.

All hazardous waste sites must be registered with the state Registry of Hazardous Waste Sites, Hinton said. The sites then are given a classification from one to five, with one being the most dangerous and five the least dangerous. As the cleanup process takes place, the sites get reclassified.

Once it gets into the system, the DEC attempts to contact the property owners or responsible people to identify the problems and come up with solutions, Hinton said.

"If the parties are unwilling — it's a costly enterprise to get into the investigations and sometimes the companies are not financially capable — or if the responsible party is unknown, then state superfunds take on the investigation," he said.

Although in many cases the company handles its own cleanup, the DEC monitors the progress. If the project stops, the DEC steps in and takes over, Hinton said.

BP of America is just one of the companies involved in the cleanup of a "Class 2" site in the Belden Center area. The company is responsible for a parcel of land that corners Hyde Park Boulevard and Rhode Island Avenue.

DEC tests have concluded that ground water is contaminated. But the company does not think that creates a health risk to nearby

residents, said Thomas Koch, director of environmental and corporate communications for BP of America.

BP is the parent company of Carborundum, which until 1993 had owned the Hyde Park facility, according to documents provided by the company.

"Any surface contamination involving our site is all within the boundaries of the property of the Global facility," Koch said. "We don't believe the health of anyone in the neighborhood is at risk because of what has happened in the past because of the Global facility."

The testing was done as part of the sales agreement with CESIWID Inc., the new owners. Carborundum and BP retained the responsibility to complete required cleanup of environmental conditions that existed prior to the sale.

Chemicals known as volatile organic compounds and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons had been detected in some soil on the plant property and in some ground water samples taken from monitoring wells on the property.

But the company is confident there is no threat to the residents' health because the drinking water is supplied by the city of Niagara Falls and does not come from ground water in the immediate area. And contaminants are at a depth or location at which no one is exposed, according to a letter BP sent to area residents in 1996.

"There is some contamination in the deeper ground water at the site," said Nathan Bigman, BP's project manager. "Actually, we are poised to do a little more investigating to see how far it has gone."

Niagara Mohawk Power Corp. spokesman Steve Schaefer said his company is interested in having its portion of the landfill cleaned. NiMo is a "passive landowner," he said. The company obtained the property after it was contaminated and took no part in the dumping that occurred there.

"We are currently continuing our investigation in conjunction with the DEC and the Department of Health," Bigman said. "We are being as proactive as we can be."

However, company officials said they don't think there is a risk of exposure to residents from the ground water contamination because the residents do not use ground water for their drinking

water. They get their water from the city, Koch said.

But Belden Center residents are not so confident. The citizens' advocate group CAPE, which stands for Citizens Against Polluting the Environment, has pleaded with the state Health Department for years for a cancer cluster study.

They got help from some area state representatives.

State Sen. George Maziarz, R-North Tonawanda, said meetings have been held with the Health Department and the DEC on the Belden Center issue.

"I intend on keeping pressure on the state Health Department and on the DEC to get some answers for those people down there," he said.

Assemblyman Joseph Pillittere, D-Lewiston, wrote to the state Health Department on the residents' behalf.

"I believe (they) have made a good case to the DOH (Department of Health) to have a health study conducted," Pillittere wrote.