

Meetings to focus on soil tests

By Matthew Winterhalter

Niagara Gazette

LEWISTON — The first of two public meetings on the results of recently performed soil tests on the grounds of the Lewiston-Porter School District has been tentatively set for Oct. 27.

Joe Gardella, a professor of chemistry and associate dean of external affairs at the State University at Buffalo Environment and Society Institute, said the meetings will be held to gather feedback and other concerns from local residents.

While plans haven't been made for cleaning up the areas of concern, Lew-Port Superintendent Whitney Vantine said the school is ready to move forward.

"We'll deal with it as we find out about it," he said.

For now, Gardella said the initial soil tests need to be followed up with further tests.

"One of the things we're going to be doing is determining the exact area of the contaminants," he said. "Then we want to come up with a strategy and make sure we get the outer ring of contaminants."

Gardella and the school district have the luxury of taking their time

"We didn't find anything to be concerned about."

Joe Gardella
professor of chemistry

because none of the areas found pose an immediate health threat.

"If I thought it was an immediate health danger, the district was ready to do something the moment I phoned in with the results," Gardella said.

Of 40 areas on the campus where the samples were taken, three turned up traces of hazardous material on the north end of campus. High levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons were found in two small areas and high levels of arsenic were found on a patch of land north of the community center.

One of the two small areas is tar, Gardella said.

"We don't know if it's left over from a paving project or something," he said.

The other area was identified from a previous study. Gardella said something may have been burned

in that area.

The arsenic was found in the area of a former orchard, Lew-Port School Board President Jim Leighton said. Gardella said further tests are needed to see how far down in the soil the arsenic is.

"The area may need just a new level of topsoil," he said.

The arsenic values were 30 to 50 parts per million as opposed to the 300 parts per million found in soil and woodchip samples at three recently closed Erie County playgrounds.

More important, was what the soil tests failed to find, Gardella said, particularly in the area of the school's athletic fields and playgrounds.

There were a lot of concerns over PCB's migrating onto the campus from the nearby Chemical Waste Management landfill. The soil test found nothing, Gardella said.

"We stressed that we found some things," he said. "We didn't find some of the things people thought we'd find. We didn't find anything to be concerned about."

Contact Matthew Winterhalter at 282-2311, ext. 2253 or
Winterhalterm@gnnewsaper.com