

Quarry eyed as site for waste disposal

Despite opposition from surrounding residents, a British firm hopes to open a chemical waste disposal plant in rural Oakland County next year that will reclaim acres of land badly scarred by decades of sand and gravel quarrying.

The plant would be built in Groveland Township near the Mt. Holly ski area, and the product of that plant synthetic rock — would be used to fill in a nearby 200-acre gravel pit.

The "rock" would be processed from a wide variety of industrial wastes, including those from the automotive, chemical and plating industries which contribute heavily to the Michigan economy.

Area residents have nothing against the reclamation of the gravel pit. They are worried, however, that their water would be contaminated, even though company officials insist that the synthetic rock would be harmless.

Plans for the plant, which would cover three acres, have been drawn up by Stablex Corporation at the firm's U.S. headquarters in Radnor, Pa.

The company already operates facilities similar to those planned for here in the United Kingdom and in Japan.

John Schofield, the American operation's president told an audience of 500 at Holly High School last week about the company's plans. Afterwards, organizers of a petition drive to block the project announced they had suspended

their efforts until the firm moves to secure zoning changes and a clean bill of health from the State Department of Natural Resources.

IT WILL TAKE the firm approximately 25 years to process enough waste to produce the fill needed to reclaim the gutted area, according to Schofield.

The plant would have the capability of processing up to 500,000 tons of industrial waste per year from a variety of sources, using special aerospace-age technology.

Exactly how the company plans to convert dangerous wastes to an inert form and win state, local and federal approval is a process best left to engineers and chemical experts to explain. But company officials say their technology does work — and it has received the backing of the British government and the massive Toyota Corporation of Japan, the prime contractor for its services in that country.

The bulk of industrial wastes are currently disposed of in this manner: They are trucked from production sites, mainly by public highway, and then dumped into holes in the ground in Michigan and other states.

Stablex's system, on the other hand, works like this: A variety of wastes are dumped into containers, and chemicals are added or subtracted, according to a prescribed formula.

The containers are constantly stirred by huge mechanical "spatulas," which causes the wastes to remain in a state of suspension.

The resultant mixture is taken from the containers and shipped to a reclamation area, where it is poured onto the ground and allowed to set.

COMPANY OFFICIALS claim they've come up with a material that is non-permeable (for at least 600 years), contains no harmful gases, has no effluent whatsoever, and can be effectively used as filler at depths of up to 50-60 feet.

The "rock" the system produces, which is called Stablex, is being used to fill in land in England which is above the main water supply of a large portion of that country and to reclaim shorelines in Japan.

The only permit needed to put the firm into operation here, according to Schofield, is one from the state of Michigan which would allow the firm to handle dangerous materials.

At the end of the 25-year reclamation period, the plant could be dismantled and moved, according to Schofield. An engineer for the company, however, said initial tests show that the inert rock substance has definite construction capabilities and could conceivably be used as foundation material for roads and buildings.



A worker walks on rock made from industrial wastes at an abandoned chalk mine in England. A similar venture has been proposed from a gravel pit near Mt. Holly.

SCHOFIELD STATED emphatically that the firm has no plans for moving into the organic or nuclear disposal field in its Michigan operations.

"We have the technology," he said, but ruled out, in addition to those two areas, dealing with oils, solvents and greases.

Initially, the plant would employ about 30 people—most of whom would be hired locally. About half of them would be professional people, who would be trained at other existing Stablex operations, and the other 15 people would be laborers.

Schofield and other company officials said they've secured a patent on their process.

He said there have been initial negotiations with automotive firms and added that wastes from the business have been satisfactorily converted into Stablex.

Asked how the system stacks up to other methods of disposal on the basis of cost, Schofield had this to say:

"I make no apologies. I will charge as much as I can. We're in this business to make a profit." However, he declined to identify the firms with which his company has been negotiating.

HE DID ADMIT that processing could range in price from as low as \$5 a ton for "simple waste" to as much as \$500 a ton for more complex materials.

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Students weigh computer's impact

Art computers and mathematicians the problem solvers of tomorrow? The members of the Metropolitan High School Mathematics Club will study that question at their meeting today at Lawrence Institute of Technology.

The college-sponsored club will hear a talk and slide show by Ruth Pavro, a member of the LIT mathematics faculty. The talk will demonstrate how mathematics can suggest solutions to

the problems of urban society in the years ahead.

Mr. Pavro, who holds a degree in art history as well as mathematics, will explain the use of computer graphics in architecture, solar energy, transportation, and city planning.

The DMHSMC is open to all interested high school students and faculty in the metropolitan Detroit area. The club

is designed to provide lectures, demonstrations, and field trips touching on topics in mathematics. Parents are also invited to attend.

The meeting will be held in Room 321 of the LIT Science Building located at 21000 W. Ten Mile Rd. (near Northwestern Highway) in Southfield. For information, call dean Margosian's office at 355-0200, ext. 61 or 104.

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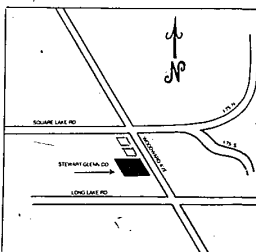
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