

DNR opens office in Plymouth Center

By Penny Wright
special writer

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is opening a new environmental protection office in the vacant Plymouth Center for Human Development this week.

Sited as part of a major reorganization effort, the new office will house 30 to 40 staff members. It will serve five counties — Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe and St. Clair.

DNR officials say the impetus came from DNR Director Donald Skoog, who has given top priority to environmental protection since coming to Michigan a year ago from Alaska.

The site is Howe Hall, part of the former PCHD mental health complex at Five Mile and Sheldon roads in Northville Township.

THE BUILDING will house four formerly separated divisions of the Region III (Lower Michigan) Environmental Protection Bureau (EPB). They are: Groundwater Quality Division, Hazardous Waste Division, Surface Water Quality Division and Air Quality Division.

"The move will improve communications between the divisions, which often work on the same cases," said Bill Marks of the EPB office in Lansing.

"Additionally, the consolidation will provide easier access for industries seeking permits and licenses."

Nine such consolidations are planned throughout the state, officials said, because of increased workloads generated by new environmental legislation and public awareness.

PREVIOUSLY, the separated divisions were located in Pontiac, Grosse

Point and the Michigan State Fairgrounds in Detroit.

"With the move, the public will be able to get answers to questions by calling one office rather than scattered offices," said Ben Hellsten, DNR business executive for Region III.

The Hazardous Waste and Groundwater Quality Division, scheduled to begin moving in Friday, can be reached at 256-1850.

(The Surface Water Quality Division will move later and can still be reached at its old number, 675-5060, in Grosse Pointe Air Quality, also scheduled for the move, can still be reached at 666-2700 in Pontiac.)

IN THE PAST, most EPB work has been centralized in Lansing. "The consolidation basically moves people out of Lansing," Marks said.

"The director wants to decentralize the operation and put the offices where they can better handle field operations." The local office will be expected to handle environmental cleanups, surveillance and planning for the five-county region.

The site — near the intersections of the I-96, I-275 and M-14 freeways — will provide them easy access to downriver communities and outlying suburbs. Because most people served by the office are outside Detroit, a suburban location became the logical choice.

The operation will include a 24-hour emergency response operation for contamination spills. "They will have a highly professional crew, and I am sure the office will be busy," Hellsten said.

The Plymouth-Northville area is home to a number of state facilities: a regional psychiatric hospital, the racing commissioner's office, a State Police district headquarters and highway post, and a state park.

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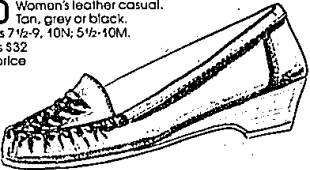
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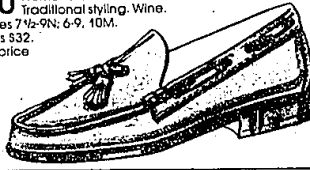
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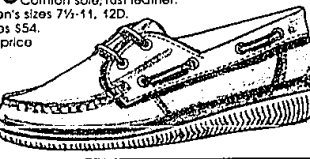
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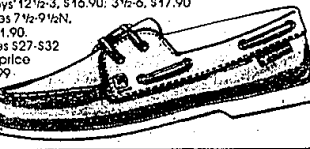
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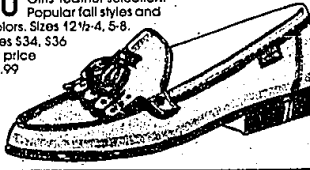
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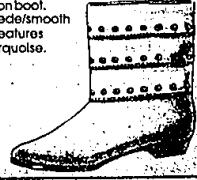
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