



SHARON LEMUE/Kraft photographer

Farmington Hills firefighter Wally Kurzeja, the city's hazardous materials specialist, reviews a demo computer disc for emergency information services. In case of a toxic-hazardous emergency, fire officials would rely on the computer to provide site maps and floor plans of the building in which a hazardous emergency is occurring and exactly where materials

are located. If weather and atmospheric conditions are plugged into the computer, fire officials could determine which way vapors might travel and whether it's necessary to evacuate residents. Such software also provides lists of chemicals in each business, toxicology reports on materials, response and clean-up procedures.

Hills keeps watch on toxic hazards

Continued from Page 1

For about 2 1/2 years, the fire department has kept binders full of materials safety data sheets detailing toxic-hazardous materials and chemicals used by companies in the city. The lists are compiled when the fire department conducts inspections twice a year.

The binders are kept in the department's fire trucks. If an emergency occurs at any of these businesses, firefighters — the city's first emergency responders — know what's in the buildings and where, and who to call in case of emergency.

"We even have people drop off boxes of materials safety data sheets. There's no fast way of doing this. Businesses come and go," said deputy Chief Peter Baldwin.

City attorney Donohue said plans are being considered to make such reporting by companies a must when they apply to the city clerk for a business license.

"THE CITY can be an information gathering agency," Donohue said. When there's a leak or a spill, for example, "the city can notify the proper authorities."

The big plan is to computerize this information because sooner or later the fire department will need a bus just to house and transport the binders to emergencies.

Fire and city officials are studying computer programs that will accommodate such detailed information for the department's computer system, as well as for lap-top computers that can fit in emergency vehicles.

Federal and state laws require employers to inform their employees of hazardous materials. Companies are required to file with the local emergency planning committee, which is Oakland County, a list and site plan of what to do in case of emergency if they have any of about 380 designated chemicals and materials.

In Farmington Hills, only about four companies are required to report under these federal and state laws because they are the only ones with large quantities of certain materials.

UNDER RIGHT To know laws, a fire chief, for example can require a list of materials safety data sheets from companies. "Facilities are expected to comply. This pertains to all chemicals on site," Kurzeja said. "We're looking at ways to check that they are reporting."

A third key federal law requires emergency responding agencies, such as the fire department, to fulfill certain safety requirements and training. "The fire department has to promote a specific level of training, a certain level of expertise," Kurzeja said.

The department's four firefighters who comprise the special emergency response team for hazardous materials are being trained at what's called the "awareness level," a level designated for police and fire.

The fire department also works with the Western Wayne County Mutual Aid Association, which also has a toxic-hazardous team.

Admittedly, if a company has a leak or disposal problem at its own site, there's a good chance no one would ever know about it even though they should report it.

Residents want stronger safeguards from city

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

David Kandt, a homeowner in the Independence Hills subdivision, feels more should be done to protect Farmington Hills residents from threats of toxic and hazardous materials.

And he's not too sure that proposed changes on the uses of toxic and hazardous materials in the city's industrial-research-office and light-industrial districts will give enough protection.

"We're dabbling with issues we don't know enough about and don't know how to control," Kandt said. "I don't think the residents of Farmington Hills want Farmington Hills to be research, high-tech."

But the city council Monday introduced the proposed changes following a public hearing. The changes would eliminate some toxic-hazardous materials from the two land-use zones and require special approval from planning commissioners for other materials. Enactment of the ordinance changes is expected in December.

"I have some reservations because of some concerns of the residents," Mayor Jean Fox said. "Yet, I feel this is a step in the right direction."

Councilman Terry Sever agreed. "We certainly need to move in a direction that makes the current IRO less offensive," he said, adding that continued monitoring is necessary.

THE PROPOSED changes are a result of a report by a city council-appointed committee that studied toxic-hazardous materials in Farmington Hills.

Pharmaceuticals and laboratories engaging in genetic research would be excluded as principal uses in the IRO and LI districts under the proposed changes. The two uses are now allowed in these districts.

In the LI district, however, pharmaceuticals and certain other materials would require special approval from the planning commission.

The proposed changes also include performance standards, which would specifically state that any permitted use of toxic-hazardous materials would be subject to state and federal regulations.

SOME RESIDENTS also remain concerned about toxic-hazardous materials even though they too believe the proposed changes are a good start. Others feel existing state and federal laws will protect residents as long as regulations continue to be enforced.

"If there's no way of policing the dangers, remove the dangers from the residents," said Hillsdale Estates Condominiums resident Pearl Burgdorf.

"I don't see why there should be any differential between neighborhoods," Kandt said.

As requested by the city council,

planning commissioners have scheduled a public hearing on the issue at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 12.

As far as Kandt is concerned, the proposed changes not only don't go far enough but are vague and do not specifically prohibit certain materials, such as radioactive substances.

Harlan Drive resident Charles Stanton said he is concerned about potential damage to groundwater. A former resident of Silicone Valley, California, Stanton, the manager of a testing laboratory, said compliance with state and federal toxic-hazardous materials relies on the good will of companies to inform the government about spills and dumping.

Yet another resident said he was tired of hearing the concerns and complaints. "If the city needs help, all they got to do is call someone."

Love those 'Pluggies'

Kids cited for giving hydrants TLC

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

More than 3,000 Pluggies dot Farmington and Farmington Hills and they need some tender loving care only children can give.

That's why the Farmington Hills Fire Department has already issued 20 certificates to children in the community who have adopted their own fire hydrant, affectionately known as Pluggies.

"Actually the children don't have any responsibilities. They can identify problems with the hydrants," said fire technician/specialist Denny Hughes.

'We'd like them (children) to identify problems if the hydrant is leaking or there's other problems. If there's some weeds, they can trim them.'

—Denny Hughes

The department's Adopt-A-Hydrant program began at the annual fire prevention open house in October. Kids who sign up for the program get to pick the hydrant of their choice. And they get an official hydrant adoption certificate bearing their name.

Pluggies need elbow room, and they can't have it if there are weeds, mounds of snow, rubbish or landscaping around them. That's where children who adopt Pluggies are important.

"We'd like them (children) to identify problems if the hydrant is leaking or there's other problems. If there's some weeds, they can trim them. We like to keep a clear path from the hydrant to the street, they can keep that clean," Hughes said.

KIDS WHO adopt hydrants are asked to keep the hydrant clear of trash, weeds and snow. And in the winter a path should be cleared between the hydrant and the street.

If problems occur with the hydrant, such as leaks or damage, the fire department should be notified 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday at 553-9744.

One of the most important things about hydrants is that they have to be visible and accessible.

"We are trying to discourage people from painting the hydrants. The hydrants need to be visible and accessible. They can't be obscured from view," said deputy Chief Peter Baldwin.



PETER BALDWIN

Eight-year-old Michael Frayne (left) and his 5-year-old brother, Christopher, sons of Farmington Hills firefighter Paul Frayne, adopted their very own fire hydrant near their house. Farmington Hills fire technician/specialist Denny Hughes is coordinating the new hydrant adoption program.

Hughes borrowed the program from a Virginia firefighter whom he met while at the National Fire Academy. "It's really more of a public relations program," Hughes said. "We have more than 3,000 hydrants. We figure with the program, we're better off than we are now."

The program is being promoted during firefighters' education programs in the elementary schools. Applications for hydrant adoption are available at fire headquarters, 25711 Drake Road, between 11 and 12 Mile roads. Applications also will be available at the elementary schools where the education programs are conducted, Hughes said.

The hydrant adoption program is strictly voluntary and involves no liabilities or actual responsibilities beyond suggestions to provide hydrants with some elbow room, Hughes said.

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COLLECTION SHOW

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Wednesday, December 5, Noon to 8 p.m.
Fine Jewelry Salon, Rochester

Thursday, December 6, Noon to 8 p.m.
Fine Jewelry Salon, Birmingham

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