

Grace geologist says:

Buried barrels did not contaminate site

By DAN KENNEDY

BOSTON — Although two rusty 55-gallon barrels that were dug up behind the East Woburn Cryovac plant in June 1983 contained chemical solvents, those solvents did not contaminate the surrounding soil or groundwater, jurors in the Woburn leukemia trial were told Monday.

Steven P. Maslansky, president of Geo Environmental Consultants Inc. of White Plains, N.Y., was the first witness to testify for W.R. Grace & Co., owner of the Cryovac food-processing equipment manufacturing facility, located at 369 Washington St.

Maslansky, a hydrogeologist, was hired by Grace to conduct a site assessment of the property and to recommend remedial action.

The facility has been plagued by chemical contamination problems since it opened in 1960.

Earlier in the trial, present and former Cryovac employees testified that they buried barrels and the contents of barrels behind the plant, and poured waste solvents into an outdoor drainage ditch and down an indoor floor drain leading to the same ditch.

The plaintiffs in the U.S. District Court trial, eight East Woburn families, charge that chemically contaminated groundwater flowed from the Cryovac property into municipal wells G and H, which are about 2,400 feet to the southwest.

Using contaminated water from the wells, which were closed in 1979 after 15 years of operation, resulted in six leukemia deaths and two illnesses, the plaintiffs say.

replied, "A little bit more than a teaspoon." The rest of the contents, he said, was water.

The other barrel contained a solvent concentration of 1,000 ppb, Maslansky added.

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But Grace officials contend the contaminated groundwater never left the Cryovac property.

Maslansky, who began working on the Cryovac site in the fall of 1982, dug at two locations behind the plant in June 1983. A magnetometer had indicated there might be metal at both locations, he explained, and, at one location, plant officials had told him there might be some buried barrels.

At the latter location, he said, he found six 55-gallon drums. Two were crushed, apparently before being buried, and two more were empty, he said. The other two were about three-fourths full.

One of the barrels, he said, contained organic solvents in the range of 150,000 parts per billion (ppb). Trichloroethylene (TCE), the principal chemical cited in the lawsuit, was present at a concentration of 105,000 ppb, he said.

Grace attorney Michael B. Keating asked Maslansky to put the 105,000 ppb figure in context by saying how much pure TCE was in the barrel.

After performing some impromptu arithmetic, Maslansky

replied, "A little bit more than a teaspoon." The rest of the contents, he said, was water.

However, Monday was the first time the jury had been told the barrels were not connected with contamination.

In a proceeding unrelated to the leukemia trial, a federal grand jury is investigating whether Grace officials lied to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in a response to an official inquiry in 1982.

The existence of the investigation was revealed last year by the Daily Times Chronicle.

Although the jurors in the leukemia trial are unaware of the grand jury probe, Keating took pains several times Monday to ask Maslansky whether he cooperated fully with the

EPA and disclosed all information to that agency. Maslansky replied that he did. Keating also asked Maslansky to detail his work as a part-time seminar instructor for EPA site coordinators.

In July 1985, Maslansky supervised the digging of 31 test trenches behind the plant. He said those diggings included excavation of every area identified by Schlichtmann and the EPA as a possible source of contamination.

In most of the trenches, Maslansky testified, no contaminants were found. But, he said, chemicals were found in two locations — in soil and groundwater near a storm drain that was used between 1966 and 1974, and in a ditch about 25 feet north of the area where the barrels were unearthed.

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Grace's co-defendant, Beatrice Foods Co., wrapped up its defense last Thursday. The plaintiffs contend that a property that is part of the Riley Leather Co. tannery, 228 Salem St., was used as a chemical dumping ground which contaminated wells G and H.

Beatrice owned the Riley tannery from 1978 to 1983 and retains legal liability.

Lawyers for both Grace and Riley say that, even if they are found liable for contaminating the wells during this first phase of the trial, the chemicals cited in the lawsuit do not cause leukemia.

