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TSONGAS ASKS EPA TO TEST CHEMICAL SEEPAGE LEVELS

Rep. Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.) has asked the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to take an active role in preventing the chemical seepage from a chemical corporation in Lowell from becoming an environmental disaster of the magnitude of the highly-publicized Love Canal in New York.

In a letter to Douglas N. Costle, EPA Administrator, Tsongas requested that the EPA's regional laboratories analyze air and water samples to determine whether the levels of chemical seepage are hazardous. Tsongas requested that the tests be taken "immediately and periodically." "If dangerous amounts are found," Tsongas said, "the EPA must provide technical and other assistance to existing local and state efforts to correct the problem."

While noting that some precautionary measures had already been taken and that the conditions in Lowell are not as severe as in the Love Canal area, Tsongas said "additional precautions should be taken to protect the public safety, particularly now that we know of the potential for disaster."

An estimated fifteen thousand fifty-five gallon drums and two twenty thousand gallon tanks of hazardous chemicals are located at the now bankrupt Silresim Chemical Corporation facility. According to state and federal officials, many of the drums on the site are deteriorating due to weather exposure and the corrosive effect of the chemicals themselves.

Government tests which were conducted several months ago indicated that significant amounts of the hazardous chemicals had seeped into the ground and the water supply. Chemical vapor levels which exceeded normal levels were also detected in the air samples.

The Massachusetts Department of Water Pollution Control has issued a request for approaches to obtain proposals on how to properly dispose of the hazardous chemicals. The bids are scheduled to be opened on August 31; the state has appropriated 1.5 million dollars for the cleanup operation.

"Because of the complexity of the problem, I am concerned that a considerable amount of time is likely to pass before the hazardous chemicals are removed. While I support current efforts to develop a long-term solution, it would be tragic if Lowell became the second Presidentially-declared disaster area caused by the hazardous chemicals because of an inadequate response by federal agencies to a known hazard," said Tsongas. "I urge EPA to carefully consider and evaluate these and other measures to avert a disaster and to assure the public safety until a permanent solution is implemented."

The letter was also sent to Mr. William Adams, EPA Regional Administrator in Boston.

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