

Tests at CTS step in right direction

Written by Katie Hicks OPINION

Sep 25

citizen-times.com

Thanks to Karen Chávez for her article “EPA begins CTS soil, water sampling” about the latest step in the federal effort to clean up toxic chemicals that have threatened the surrounding Skyland community for decades. The Environmental Protection Agency follows a similar series of steps across the country at contaminated “Superfund” sites. The entire process, as Ms. Urquhart-Foster admits, can take years to complete — and at the CTS site, it didn’t even begin until long after contamination was discovered.

Many community members’ opinions about EPA are not favorable, and with good reason. The agency has failed them over the past decades. People weren’t informed of the toxic dangers in their wells and springs. Facts have been hidden and action delayed, thanks to a mysterious mixture of negligence, resistance from CTS and the sluggish forward movement of federal bureaucracy. Folks have gotten sick, and nothing can make that right.

However, many years later than it should have been, the site is now on the slow track toward cleanup. EPA is jumping through the necessary hoops to force CTS to pay for remediation, even as CTS’ legal team does everything it can to get out of removing this poisonous mess.

Unfortunately, the Superfund law is weak — Congress has not given EPA the powers and resources to hold polluting corporations accountable for their actions. The agency has to cross their t’s and dot their i’s to have a chance at forcing CTS to act at all.

That’s one reason it’s so important that the citizen group POWER has formed to monitor the process and advocate for the community. Recognizing that EPA is the only federal agency that can enforce cleanup, the members of POWER have temporarily set aside resentment and anger at EPA’s past actions to work for the swiftest, most thorough cleanup possible from this point forward. Current EPA staff face an uphill battle, but they have listened and responded to community pressure to move forward with sampling when it had stalled, and to make exceptions to “business as usual” so that families facing ongoing health risks can be protected and the past doesn’t continue to repeat itself.

It’s not a fresh start, it’s not an ultimate solution, but the start of sampling at the CTS site is a step in the right direction, and cause to celebrate as community members continue to speak out for a full cleanup.

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