

DOE not seeking landowner buyout

■ **Agency will discuss year-long study pertaining to contaminated groundwater.**

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The Department of Energy has no plans to buy land above a massive area of contaminated groundwater near the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, but Joey Wray says many of his neighbors wouldn't be interested even if an offer were made.

"Most of us wouldn't be for it," said Wray, who lives at 6355 Metropolis Lake Road. "The reason is most of us have lived here our entire lives. It's our home, our parents' home and our grandparents' home."

He also wonders why DOE is even considering a buyout if the contamination is no longer a threat. Since 1994, the government has provided free municipal water to 121 plant-neighboring households and businesses because of an estimated 10 billion gallons of contaminated groundwater. The area is 60 to 120 feet deep, flows from the uranium-enrichment plant to the Ohio River



BARKLEY THIELEMAN/The Sun

This well monitors groundwater on Glenda Wray's property on Metropolis Lake Road.

and contains trichloroethylene, once liberally used by the factory as a degreaser.

Wray and his mom, Glenda Wray, shared those opinions at

a DOE public meeting last June, and they plan to attend a follow-up meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the

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DOE not proposing buyout of landowners

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Heath High School auditorium. DOE officials will reveal the findings of a year-long study that included land acquisition among the alternatives for dealing with the contamination.

DOE is not offering to buy land, spokeswoman Laura Schachter said. Instead, the findings and public comments will be submitted to Congress April 16 because the study was mandated by lawmakers, she said.

"I think the department is really sensitive to the fact there is

anxiety and interest," Schachter said. "But no decision has been made (to buy land)."

The study contains cost estimates and spells out ways to buy land or land interests, she said. "It's really bringing together all this information and presenting it under a set of parameters and possibilities, but it isn't a recommendation."

Schachter said most of the comments have been from people who merely want to understand the buyout options. If buying land were truly an option, it probably would be considered as part

of the overall cleanup work at the plant as governed by federal laws, she said.

Federal legislation sponsored by Sen. Mitch McConnell required DOE to study whether a buyout is in taxpayers' best interests. Work focused on land under which contaminated groundwater flows in a horseshoe-shaped plume away from the plant. Another pollutant, radioactive technetium, is present but in much less quantity than the degreaser.

DOE evaluated public and private land in blocks at fair market value as compared with other

property in McCracken County. Among those sealed by DOE is return for free municipal water. Monitoring wells on their farm-land continue to test for contamination.

The Wrays were among about 135 people owning 82 pieces of land who joined a 1997 federal lawsuit alleging former plant contractors poisoned and devalued their land. The suit remains before the U.S. 8th Circuit Court of Appeals after being dismissed in Paducah in early 2004.

"There are definitely some who would be interested in selling," Wray said. "I'm not faulting them at all."

Wray's family wells were

dated five years ago that such a buyout would cost \$15 million.

In addition to pumping and treating groundwater, DOE spends \$70,000 to \$100,000 a year providing free water. No technique has been discovered to effectively clean up the groundwater, but DOE will try to remove the chief source of the pollution by using in-ground electrodes to evaporate the degreaser from beneath a plant cleaning building.

That work is expected to start next winter and will take about nine months.