

A dangerous threat to our health and safety

GUEST OPINION

By FRED STINE

Elcon's choice to build a chemical hazardous waste treatment facility on land that is connected by waterways and less than a half mile from the drinking water source for millions of people is irresponsible planning and unnecessarily risks the health and public safety of people and the non-human species dependent on a clean river.

Elcon is not a water-dependent facility, yet building on Dean Sievers Place will result in trucking hazardous waste, including cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury, arsenic, benzene, vinyl chloride, landfill leachate and over 500 other chemicals, to the river.

The Elcon site also is a poor choice because it is located in the 500-year floodplain. That sounds like it is safe, but it's not. In fact, the City of Philadelphia, the Delaware River Basin Commission, the Army Corps of Engineers and even the Department of Defense are taking concrete steps at responsibly addressing the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise. It's a fact that Philly and the Basin

Commission recently made similar recommendations that critical infrastructure, such as hospitals, police stations and schools should not be built in 500-year floodplains because river and localized flooding is getting worse and is projected to continue to do so. When flooding experts come together and, based on strong, sound scientific evidence, say don't build a police station in the 500-year floodplain, doesn't it stand to reason that it is not logical or prudent to place tons of chemical hazardous waste in a similar location?

Elcon promises to follow the regulations and have safety systems in place, including containment structures, to protect the community and the river. But as we all know too well, safety systems and regulations fail. Who doesn't think that there were not safety precautions and regulations in place on the BP Deepwater Horizon before that blew up and

millions of gallons of oil spilled in the Gulf, or at the PP&L Martins Creek power plant when a containment pool breached and dumped millions of tons of ash into the river? Or, before Merck Pharmaceuticals had a spill and contaminated the Wissahickon Creek killing thousands of fish and other aquatic life?

Potential accidents could occur at the Elcon facility or with any of the 25 trucks coming through Falls Township every day. Accidents happen and there is industry throughout our communities, but we're talking about making the informed decision of placing a brand new pollution threat next to

our most precious resource — our drinking water.

It's a fact that the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) estimated that a chemical spill from Elcon could force a shutdown of their Delaware River water intake, located 15 miles downriver, for almost four days. That is a serious

danger and being cautious is what we want from the agency charged with providing safe and abundant drinking water.

Many Bucks County communities (more than a dozen) get part or all of their water from the Delaware through direct water intakes — either at the PWD's or from several intakes that are located very close to Elcon's proposed site making them much more susceptible to being impacted by a spill so hopefully Bucks County water providers will be equally cautious and speak out against this new pollution source.

So, yes, it's a fact that the Delaware Riverkeeper Network and the many other organizations and a vast and quickly growing number of residents are being extremely cautious and for good reason. It is our drinking water, and our river. Thousands of jobs and businesses depend on a clean and healthy river. Our efforts are geared toward making sure PADEP and our local, county and state elected officials also see the wisdom of being cautious and not allowing Elcon to threaten our public safety and health. That it is smarter, more responsible and less costly to "tell Elcon *No*."

Fred Stine is the Citizen Action Coordinator for the Delaware Riverkeeper Network.

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