

Residents fretting over water quality

By EMILY STRANGER

Robin Reichenbach is accustomed to drinking bottled water, and it's not because she has expensive tastes.

Ever since Tropical Storm Tammy flooded Brunswick in October 2005, Reichenbach has been concerned about her drinking water.

Pollutants from the Brunswick Wood Preserving Superfund site, which borders her property, seeped into her water well during flooding caused by the storm.

The plant, now abandoned, operated from 1958 to 1991 on an 84-acre site on Perry Lane Road. It treated wood using hazardous chemicals like pentachlorophenol, creosote, chromium, copper and arsenic.



Robin Reichenbach lives next to the old Brunswick Wood Preserving plant on Floraville Road, designated a Superfund Site by the federal government. (Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News)

"The flood water came right up here, to my hips," she said, gesturing toward her belt buckle. "My son had to drive through the water in his pickup truck just to pick me up from the front porch."

Like other neighbors, Reichenbach worried about contamination from rainwater runoff from the site, designated by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as a Superfund site for immediate cleanup.

"The (Environmental Protection Agency) furnished us with bottled water until it tested the well and made sure it was fine," Reichenbach said.

Even though both Reichenbach and her husband, Donald Reichenbach, had clean water to drink, they needed water in which to bathe.

"When I asked them about taking baths and showers (until the well was tested), they told me they guess I should just keep my mouth closed whenever I take a shower," Robin Reichenbach said.

The wells have since been tested several times, most recently in January, she said.

So far, they have come up clean, although the Reichenbachs still buy bottled water just to be on the safe side.

"Even though they say the well is fine, I just don't trust it," Robin Reichenbach said.

She also doesn't trust the soil in her backyard, where the flood water lay stagnant for almost a week.

"After the flooding, the EPA told us it was going to do the soil testing right away," she said. "But it never did."

Today, Reichenbach's house, at the end of Floraville Lane, is separated from her toxic neighbor by a chain-link fence that was put up several years ago. Weathered metal signs now face Reichenbach's property, warning her of the dangers on the other side.

It wasn't like that when they moved in eight years go. The fences weren't there, and she had no idea at the time that her son's woodland "playground" was once a wood treatment plant.

"My son had a dirt bike and used to play out in the woods back there everyday," she said.

"The (Environmental Protection Agency) told me I should get a special kind of well just in case (Brunswick) floods again," Reichenbach said. "It would cost me almost \$6,000, and I don't think I should have to buy one for their mistake."

On Thursday, residents concerned about the Brunswick Wood Preserving site will meet with EPA staff and contractors to answer questions and provide information about the Superfund site.

Reichenbach won't be able to attend because she has to work, but she knows others who will be going, including Daniel Parshley of the Glynn County Environmental Coalition.

Parshley said EPA did some clean up of the area.

"Up to 1997, some progress was made and 151,000 tons of contaminated material was disposed off-site," Parshley said. "That leaves more than a million cubic yards still at the site.

"The underlying problem and the cause of the flooding is that the EPA left the job half done."

In addition to nearby residential wells, six municipal wells that serve thousands of residents are within a 4-mile radius of the site.

Learn more:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will meet with residents who live in the area of the abandoned wood-treating plant on Perry Lane Road from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday at the Stellar Conference Center on Venture Drive, Brunswick.