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## Saukville firm used TCE, retiree says

By Thomas J. Hagerty  
Journal Environmental Reporter

A cleaning solvent containing trichloroethylene was used years ago by Northern Signal Co. in Saukville, a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources investigator said Wednesday.

Frank Trcka of the DNR said Milton Curtz, a retired Northern Signal employe, had told him that the firm used the solvent to clean transformers made in Chicago for the farm

fence control systems assembled in the 1960s in Saukville.

Trcka, other DNR employes and the US Environmental Protection Agency are investigating how potentially dangerous trichloroethylene, or TCE, got into Saukville groundwater.

Because of the Curtz statements and other information, the regional EPA enforcement chief in Chicago said he would ask EPA lawyers later this week to file a formal order under the federal Clean Water Act requiring Northern Signal to disclose

past chemical waste disposal practices.

Curtz, of the Town of Saukville, said he did not know how Northern had disposed of the solvent or who supplied it, said Trcka. Curtz could not be reached by The Journal for comment.

Pollutants travel through groundwater as little as a few feet a year, so Northern Signal could be the TCE source, said Edward DiDomenico, the regional EPA chief who is supervising

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the Saukville investigation.

Until Northern Signal moved to Rochester, Minn., in 1971, it made farm fence controls in a building at 350 Tower Dr., Saukville, that houses a well. Its present occupants say they never have used the well for waste disposal.

A month ago, Theodore Bosch of the DNR noticed that water from the abandoned Northern Signal well had a stronger odor, indicative of TCE pollution, than the water from an industrial well about 600 feet away that was found to have contained TCE last November. The industrial well water is used by Freeman Chemical Corp. to cool equipment in its Saukville plant.

### Compound cleared

In a related matter, Freeman Chemical has been notified that a cleaning solvent called Ferro-Terj, which it has used since 1974, has never contained TCE.

R. Charles Ross, vice president and general manager for Freeman Chemical, said the information came in a letter received Wednesday from the solvent supplier, DuBois Chemicals Division of Chemed Corp., Sharonville, Ohio.

Ross, who said he did not know what solvent Freeman had used before 1974, or its chemical mix, he would ask Saukville plant manager Russell Cerk to search records for the answer. Freeman has been in Saukville for more than 30 years.

### 0.9 ppb in November

The concentration of TCE in the November water samples from the Freeman well, the last taken, was 0.9 parts per billion. That was nearly double an earlier 1980 reading obtained by the EPA, but was still non-hazardous. The EPA considers the compound to be cancer causing at 4.5 ppb.

No TCE has been found in Saukville's community wells.

Jan 12, 1981

# More tests of Saukville water planned

\* By Thomas J. Hagerty

Journal Environmental Reporter

A wider search for toxic chemicals in Saukville water will begin next month, according to Edward DiDomenico, an official with the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Water samples will be taken in mid-February from all three community wells, from a well now used only by Freeman Chemical Corp. and, in all likelihood, from a long-abandoned industrial well once used by Northern Signal Co., DiDomenico said last week.

The samples will be tested at the agency's laboratory in Chicago for benzene and trichloroethylene. Both compounds are potentially cancer-causing.

Chemical analyses last year showed the contaminants had not reached drinking-water wells. But the concentration of trichloroethylene last November at Well 2, which only Freeman Chemical uses,

had risen to 0.9 parts per billion. The EPA considers the chemical cancer-causing for people at 4.5 ppb.

"We consider this case a lot more important than we did a few months ago," DiDomenico said.

DiDomenico, EPA's Midwest enforcement chief, and officials of the State Department of Natural Resources said they agreed Thursday during a conference call that the broader water-testing program was needed.

DiDomenico also said he would order Freeman Chemical to disclose the chemical content of a cleaning solvent it first used in 1974 if efforts by The Milwaukee Journal to obtain those records fail.

He said the EPA would test samples for two main reasons: because water from a well abandoned in 1971 by Northern Signal Co. had an odor indicating severe chemical contamination and because the level last November of trichloroethylene at Well 2 was nearly double earlier readings there.

Well 2 had supplied drinking water for residents until Theodore Bosch, a DNR community water supply supervisor, reasoned that it probably was the source of odors in the municipal system and should be disconnected from the village system.

Well 2 water was rerouted two years ago to Freeman and is used only by the company and only for industrial cooling.

The Northern Signal well was abandoned in 1971, when the fence-control manufacturing operation moved to Rochester, Minn.

Northern officials in Rochester have been unable to find Saukville plant records showing what chemicals, if any, Northern might have dumped into or near the well in the 1960s and earlier.

Daniel Wilson, a groundwater specialist for the DNR, said he thought heavy pumping of cooling water by Freeman probably was drawing whatever trichloroethylene remained in groundwater to Well 2.

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...a geometric painting in a circular form...  
by Fritz Glarner (1899-1972). Both are currently  
on view at the museum.

## Saukville<sup>2</sup> water to be discussed

State and federal environmental officials next week will discuss where and how often Village of Saukville groundwater should be tested for possible chemical pollution.

Officials of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in Madison and Milwaukee and the US Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago will discuss Jan. 8 what kind of tests would be best, and which agency should perform them, said Daniel Wilson, public well water specialist for the DNR in Madison.

Low-level concentrations of toxic benzene and trichloroethylene (TCE) were detected last January at Well 2. That well was disconnected from the community system two years ago and now is used exclusively for cooling water by Freeman Chemical Co. in Saukville.

EPA tests on samples taken last July and November showed that water from wells that provided drinking water was safe.

Samples taken Nov. 18 from Well 2 detected no benzene but did contain 0.9 parts per billion (ppb) of TCE, compared with 0.5 ppb the preceding January.

"I'm pretty satisfied that it [TCE] is not getting into the drinking water," said Wilson.

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# EPA notes increase in level of toxic chemical in water

By MIKE BEIGHTOL

Saukville — There has been an increase in the level of a toxic chemical found in a well used by the Freeman Chemical Corp, an official of the US Environmental Protection Agency said Friday.

Edward DiDomenico, an enforcement chief with the EPA in Chicago, said Friday that results from a Nov. 18 test indicated 0.9 parts per billion of trichloroethylene in Well No. 2.

Thursday, officials said preliminary reports indicated the level of TCE in the well remained the same or decreased from last January's level of 0.5 parts per billion.

Donald Maddox, an EPA section chief, said the increase does not necessarily endanger the village water supply.

"If the level of contamination starts to go up, after repeated pumping, you can educatedly guess that the contamination is being drawn closer to that well," Maddox said. "That fact may mean a decrease-

## Saukville

ing chance of contamination at other (village) wells."

Tests showed Well No. 1, which supplies the village with drinking water, contained no benzene or TCE.

The results also confirmed benzene had dissipated from Well No. 2 from an earlier level of 0.2 parts per billion. Both chemicals can cause cancer.

Maddox said a TCE level of 4.0 parts per billion could constitute a health hazard.

Village Administrator Michael Harrigan said officials might look into the practices of the Northern Signal Co., formerly located in Saukville, in connection with the contamination of Well No. 2.

The firm, which moved to Rochester, Minn., in 1970, used a solvent to remove a protective grease applied to unfinished

metals, said Richard Thompson, the firm's manager.

Thompson said he has begun a search of company records to determine whether the solvent contained TCE. He said the company stopped using the solvent after moving to Rochester.

"It's been a long time since we were down there (in Saukville)," Thompson said. "I really have to plead ignorance on what was in the solvent."

Thompson said the firm used the solvent "at least five years." He said he didn't know how the solvent was disposed of.

Thompson said he knew of no solvent spills at the Saukville site. The firm manufactures electric fence control boxes.

Harrigan had said the firm used materials that contained TCE "in sizable amounts."

No one from the EPA or the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources have contacted the firm about the contamination, Thompson said.

Water safe

The drinking water supply in Saukville is safe. Officials of the federal environmental protection agency (EPA) and the Wisconsin

department of natural resources (DNR) repeated that assurance Tuesday. "There is no evidence of contamination in the public water supply in Saukville."

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Ted Boesch of the DNR said.

His statement was repeated by Ed DiDomenico of the EPA.

Both men told Ozaukee Press Tuesday that the continued monitoring of well number two at Saukville was being done to determine the source of the trichloroethylene and benzene that had been found in the water. Well two has not been on the public water supply system since early 1979.

"We have been doing quarterly monitoring since the situation was discovered," DiDomenico said Tuesday. "We have not started any new monitoring program and we are not doing any speeding up of testing of the Saukville water."

Testing is being done at the Chicago office of the EPA in an effort to discover the source of the trichlorethylene and benzene in well two.

There is no evidence of any of the contaminants in the other wells in the village. And the amount of contaminants in well two does not approach toxic levels, both men said.

The need for the assurances arose last week, when several articles in the Milwaukee Journal stated that the groundwater in Saukville was contaminated and that the Journal article spurred increased



Michael Harrigan

said, "We do not feel Freeman Chemical Corp. is responsible for the alleged contamination of Saukville well two."

DiDomenico has also said that there is no direct link between Freeman and the components found in the well two water. Tests have been made at Freeman's plant, at Tri Par and Saukville Foods while water samples have been collected from well two, well one and well four.

The results of the samples taken in July were inconclusive the EPA reported in November. That meant that the testing could not find the minuscule amounts that might be found in the water and that testing of samples taken No. 18 would be done

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## Leaks of the 50s <sup>2</sup> problems for 80s?

Could the benzene and trichloroethylene that have been found in minute proportions in the well two at Saukville come from incidents more than 20 years ago?

That suggestion was raised by Freeman Chemical Corp. officials Monday at a press conference.

The benzene could have come from a May 8, 1956, gasoline spill when 7,000 gallons of gasoline leaked into a creek at Saukville when a valve on a bulk plant tank was left open. The gasoline was flushed into a creek and then set on fire to burn it off.

The possibility exists that some of that gasoline, which contains benzene, could have seeped into the ground, Freeman suggested.

Freeman officials also said that spent dry cleaning fluids which contain trichloroethylene were discarded near the well.

According to the Freeman release, there is common knowledge that such fluids were discarded near well number two. Efforts by the Ozaukee Press to learn when the fluids were discarded and who did the dumping have not been successful.

Trichloroethylene is also used as a degreaser.

Northern Signal Co. had a big degreasing pit in its plant in Saukville which has been closed for about 10 years.

What happened to those fluids in the pit when the plant was closed cannot be determined.

A former employe of Northern Signal and the present occupants of the building on Tower St. cannot recall what disposal method was used.

However, former employes of the firm remember the degreasing operation.

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# Drinking water safe, Saukville tests show

Saukville — Test results of water samples taken from Saukville wells last July 29 and Nov. 18 show that community water is safe to drink, Village Administrator Michael Harrigan said Friday.

However, a US Environmental Protection Agency official said tests on the November samples, just completed, showed that toxic trichloroethylene concentrations had increased at Well No. 2, which was taken off the community system and hooked up to the Freeman Chemical Corp. more than a year ago.

Harrigan said recent stories in The Milwaukee Journal had exaggerated the potential danger to Saukville water consumers of toxic benzene and trichloroethylene detected in village groundwater last January.

There are four wells in Saukville. Well No. 2 does not provide water for drinking. The other three do. The July 29 test included all four wells. The Nov. 18 tests were drawn from wells No. 1 and 2. Both tests showed that water from wells that provide drinking water was safe, according to the EPA test results.

In recent stories, The Journal reported efforts by EPA and Wisconsin

Department of Natural Resources officials to identify the source of the earlier contamination and to determine whether the two toxic chemicals were at dangerous levels and moving toward community wells.

Based on records of the US Environmental Protection Agency and the village, low concentrations of two toxic chemical compounds, benzene (.2 parts per billion) and trichloroethylene or TCE (.5 ppb), were detected in samples taken by the EPA from Well No. 2 last Jan. 15. The Journal reported last week that the well was disconnected from the community system Feb. 28, 1979, and hooked up to Freeman nine months later.

No traces of benzene or TCE were detected in the July samples in the wells. The July samples were tested by an outside laboratory. EPA enforcement chief Edward DiDomenico said the analytical equipment and methods used in the July lab tests were not sensitive enough to reliably detect whether the two toxic substances were at levels considered dangerous for human health.

DiDomenico said Friday that test results on the November samples showed no benzene at either community well No. 1 or at No. 2, but that the findings were preliminary.

# Is solvent source of toxics?

By Thomas J. Hagerty  
Journal Environmental Reporter

Was a chemical cleaning solvent used by Freeman Chemical Corp. in Saukville the source of toxic trichloroethylene found in the village drinking water supply?

A spokesman for the solvent supplier said Tuesday that trichloroethylene, or TCE, could have been an ingredient, but that he would search company records only if Freeman officials requested the information by letter.

In an interview after a news conference Monday, George H. MacDonald, president of Freeman, said his company had not tried to determine whether the solvent contained TCE. The solvent was used throughout the 1970s and before to triple-rinse the insides of chemical tankers in the Saukville resin plant, he said.

At the news conference, MacDonald complained that The Milwaukee Journal had exaggerated the potential cancer threat posed by TCE found last January at Well No. 2 in village near the Freeman plant.

MacDonald also accused the newspaper of acting irresponsibly in quoting regulatory officials who suspect Freeman is the source of TCE. Similar criticism of The Journal by another Freeman official was reported on the front page of The Journal last Friday.

MacDonald said he did not believe that any substances containing TCE or benzene had ever been used, manufactured or stored at the Saukville plant — except in "very small amounts" for research purposes.

Both TCE and benzene — which also was discovered in Saukville water in January — are listed by the EPA as cancer-causing at difficult-to-detect (parts per billion) concentrations.

"Why does everyone point at Freeman?" said Glenn R. Svoboda, Freeman vice president for research and

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development. If TCE was in solvents used by Freeman, "then that's their [the suppliers'] problem, isn't it?" he said.

R. Charles Ross, Freeman vice president and general manager, identified the solvent supplier as DuBois Chemicals Division of Chemed Corp., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Ralph Simpson, a chemist for DuBois' regulatory compliance section, said that DuBois currently was putting no TCE in the solvent, called Ferro-Terj, but that his company might have sold Freeman a solvent in the early to mid-1970s that contained TCE.

"I can't give that information to

you," said Simpson. "Company policy."

At dump sites Freeman has used, MacDonald said, "there would have had to be very large quantities in order for there to be any danger" to human health.

MacDonald said the company never had tested its sanitary sewer lateral for leaks. Some of the solvent could have ended up in the sewers and leaked into groundwater, he said.

He said Freeman attempted to capture the used solvent for recycling, but that some could escape into sewers, even though drains on the cement floor where trucks are triple-rinsed have been plugged.