

Colorado rejects N.J. waste

By B.J. Plasket

The Daily Record News Group

Copyright 2002

DENVER - State health officials announced on Tuesday that they have rejected the Cotter Corporation's plan to bring 470,000 tons of radioactive waste from Maywood, N.J., to its Canon City mill, citing an inadequate environmental assessment.

"The environmental assessment submitted to the department's Laboratory and Radiation Services program did not fully address key issues related to the transport of the material," said Doug Benevento, the acting executive director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Benevento also said Cotter's environmental assessment provided insufficient information on the socio-economic impacts of the shipment on the Canon City community.

Jody Enderle, the secretary of the Canon City-based Colorado Citizens Against ToxicWaste group, said the organization was "elated" by the news.

"I think this is a very wise decision for our community," she said. "We will continue to educate and watch to make sure that things are done within the law."

Cotter earlier this year announced plans to bring 40,000 tons of what health officials called "mildly contaminated waste" to the Canon City mill from the Maywood Chemical Co. Superfund site in New Jersey as part of the eventual shipment of 470,000 tons of the material.

The shipments were put on hold, however, when the Colorado Legislature -- reacting to community opposition to the shipments -- passed House Bill 1408, which requires a public comment period and an environmental impact study before radioactive waste can be brought to the state.

In a letter sent to Cotter on Monday, CDPHE radiation and laboratory director David Butcher said, "The environmental assessment done pursuant to House Bill 1408 is not adequate."

Butcher's letter said Cotter's environmental assessment "fails to mention previously identified potential accident types, consequences and safety requirements" for the transportation of the Maywood soil. The letter said the assessment lacked "more current accident type and rate data for the segment between Chicago and Canon City, in particular for the segments of the transport route through Colorado" and failed to evaluate "alternatives to rail transit through Colorado." The assessment, Butcher's letter said, also failed to evaluate the impact of what it called "potential releases" from the material and "near-site rail car handling."

Benevento said the assessment also suffered from "the lack of social sciences data assessing the significance or influence - whether favorable, neutral or negative - on the residents of the community and

on the perceptions of the many tourists who visit the area."

Benevento added that the portion of Cotter's application dealing with analyses of public and occupational health risk and safety information was "found to be acceptable."

CDPHE spokeswoman Cindy Parmenter said the Wednesday decision ends the department's consideration of the Maywood soil issue, but said Cotter can file a new application in the future if it so desires.

So far there is no word on whether or not that will happen. Neither Cotter President Richard Cherry nor Executive Vice President Rich Zeigler could be reached for comment after the decision was announced. Earlier, the two Cotter executives said that receipt of the Maywood soil was essential to their plans to add zirconium processing to the mill. Disposal of the soil would provide the cash needed to retool the mill, they said. It also would provide cover for the mill's more radioactive tailings, they said.

The health department is also currently considering Cotter's application for renewal of its radiation license and is monitoring the current suspension of that license that resulted from a series of safety violations. The CDPHE recently allowed Cotter to begin partial operations to see if it can abide by safety measures imposed by the state.

[Return to the Critical Mass home page](#)