

IBM workers question chemical safety

By LOIS FICTEAU

A group purporting to be an underground "union" of International Business Machine Corp. workers has printed a newsletter questioning the safety of the company's storage of chemicals in Endicott.

Calling itself "IBM Workers United," the group questions the location of the chemical-storage tanks at IBM (near the railroad tracks north of North Street and east of Oak Hill Avenue), and asks what safety precautions have been taken in case of emergency.

IBM officials today denied knowledge of the group and said the company takes all possible safety precautions in its storage of chemicals.

"We are not aware of any employees associated with this group, and we have no basis on which to make any comment on them," IBM spokesman Joseph E. Dahm said.

IBM has received all applicable permits

from the state and local agencies concerning its storage of chemicals, Dahm said.

In the newsletter, the group questioned the precautions taken by IBM in case of a train derailment near its chemical tank farm.

"This is something we're very concerned about, because the tanks are so near the railroad tracks," explained Mike Maguire, a group member using a pseudonym. The group was formed four years ago and has about 15 members, Maguire said.

"IBM takes all possible safety precautions when locating chemical storage tanks near railroad tracks, as well as away from railroad tracks," Dahm said.

IBM chose the North Street location to store chemicals used in its manufacturing process for several reasons, Dahm said:

"They are remote from our buildings, but are not excessively long pipe runs. We have access to roads and driveways for delivery.

They're close to the railroad tracks for alternative delivery, and they provide sufficient inventory to carry out manufacturing operations," Dahm said.

Dahm said flammable chemicals are stored below ground in concrete vaults where there would be little or no impact in case of a train derailment. Other chemicals are stored above ground in tanks with spill containment provisions, as required by federal law, he said.

The chemicals range from organic solvents, such as methylchloroform and xylene, to inorganic acids and bases, such as hydrochloric acid and liquid nitrogen, Dahm said.

The tank farm has a built-in automatic foam fire-extinguishing system, Dahm said.

IBM also has evacuation plans for all departments which provide for the shutdown of critical equipment and alternative routes for leaving buildings, Dahm said.

"We have fire prevention and emergency personnel. Obviously they would work very closely with the village, should an emergency arise," Dahm said.

Endicott Fire Chief John Johnson said today he is satisfied with the safety measures taken by IBM.

"Their tank farm complied with all state codes. As a matter of fact they went over in most instances," Johnson said.

IBM works closely with the Endicott Fire Department in its storage of chemicals, Johnson said.

"We have 100 percent cooperation," Johnson said, pointing to the company's donation last December of a \$150,000 fire engine to the village.

Designed to fight chemical fires with a mixture of high-pressure water and foam, the engine is the only one of its kind in upstate New York.

Feb.

10, 1981

IBM worker: Watchdog needed

BY PAUL SHUKOVSKY

In testimony last month at hearings in Washington, D.C., a member of a covert organization of IBM Corp. workers called on federal environmental officials to be "watchdogs" over corporations that might be causing groundwater pollution.

Using the pseudonym "Mike Maguire," a member of IBM Workers United testified before a Jan. 31 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) hearing on its proposed national

"Maguire," an employee at IBM Endicott, used the pseudonym to protect his identity because, he said, he fears his underground union activities would jeopardize his job.

"Maguire" gave an overview of the series of chemical spills at IBM that prompted the corporation to drill numerous wells around Endicott to test for groundwater pollution. Those tests revealed that hazardous chemicals were present in the top layer of groundwater under the village.

The underground union leader called on the

EPA to "play a stronger role in investigation and enforcement, especially in areas where large corporations can intimidate small governmental bodies and where the state possibly has little resources or is afraid of driving business out of the state."

"Maguire" questioned whether large corporations should be entrusted to investigate themselves. "Throughout this whole episode of groundwater pollution, getting information from IBM was like pulling teeth," Maguire said.

Binghamton
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