

NATION Star-Gazette, Saturday, May 20, 2000 3A

Plan would relocate 2 Ohio schools built on toxic site

The Associated Press

MARION, Ohio — Two schools built on a site contaminated with suspected cancer-causing chemicals would be rebuilt elsewhere under a preliminary agreement announced Friday.

The state, the Army Corps of Engineers and River Valley Local Schools also agreed in principle to develop the Marion County campus for industrial use.

"When you look at this at all sides, this is the cost-effective argument and the best way to go. To clean it up and maintain the school

is too costly," River Valley Schools Superintendent Tom Shade said.

The 78-acre campus in Marion, about 40 miles north of Columbus, was once home to an Army depot used as a dump for spent solvents and other chemical wastes. Rusting barrels have been found on adjacent Army Reserve property. The schools, which have about 775 students total, were built in 1962.

An investigation began after questions were raised about leukemia cases among the high school's graduates.

Nearly 70 current and former Marion County residents were diagnosed with leukemia between

1992 and 1996, and the state health department last July confirmed nine cases among River Valley High graduates. No cause has been found.

Contamination was found below the soil, and some athletic fields were abandoned and fenced off two years ago. Authorities say they still believe the site — other than the six acres of fenced-off areas — is safe for students and school staff.

But Gov. Bob Taft said that after at least six months of discussions, officials concluded that building a new campus would be cheaper than

cleaning up the site enough for the schools to stay.

"The soils have been investigated; they are clearly contaminated," he said. "The school has already lost a significant part of its property for ballfields and play areas."

English teacher Lisa Hollaway said Friday she has her doubts about the safety of the current site.

"We are getting mixed messages," Hollaway said. "They tell us it's safe, now they tell us we have to relocate. There must be something wrong if they're making us move."

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Sun, Mar 31, 2019