

6-Pinellas

Tainted soil still at Suncoast Dome

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Tribune Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — Two truckloads of chemically tainted soil have been removed from a construction site at the Florida Suncoast Dome, but a smaller amount of more concentrated, contaminated soil remains at the dome.

Bill Hargett, public works administrator, said the material was discovered several weeks ago during construction to shore up the banks of Booker Creek, which runs

through the dome complex.

While moving earth, workers uncovered a small, underground storage tank, Hargett said. Tests later showed about five cubic yards of material in the bottom of the tank to be contaminated with benzene, a chemical solvent. Another 49 cubic yards of soil around the tank — about two truckloads worth — also contained some contaminants, but at a lower concentration.

Mary Yeargan, an environmental specialist with the state Department of Environmental Regulation

(DER), said the two truckloads of soil were moved Wednesday from the dome to the city's Toiyawa Landfill, where about 125,000 cubic yards of material from the dome's earlier, massive toxic waste discovery was taken. The material at the landfill is undergoing cleanup. The landfill is just east of Interstate 275, between Gandy and Roosevelt boulevards.

Tom Gibson, the city's assistant engineering director, said the remaining material at the dome — about 10 yard bags' worth — has

been sealed in containers and secured in a fenced area while officials await word from DER about what to do with it.

Hargett put the cost of the new cleanup at roughly \$10,000 to \$15,000, although the price could rise depending on the disposal requirements of the remaining material.

The cost of the original cleanup at the dome, for years the site of a municipal gas plant, was about \$3.7 million.

Hurricane official warns of 'the big one'

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Clearwater city commissioners, however, tentatively passed an ordinance last Thursday that does away with the life-of-the-structure rule, substituting a one-year policy instead. Only when building improvements exceeded 50 percent of a building's value in a single year would the flood requirements kick in. Commissioners are expected to give final approval when they meet Sept. 5.

City officials question the validity of the state rule because it originates, they say, from a staff interpretation of federal policy instead of formal rule-of-law-making.

State rules, furthermore, have been applied unevenly across the state's coastal cities, Clearwater officials say.

Business interests and beach property owners have pushed for the Clearwater ordinance, saying the current rules violate their property rights.

Some state officials, meanwhile, have begun

to call for far tougher restrictions on rebuilding after a hurricane because of the expected demands on taxpayers.

In the short term, making it difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild after a hurricane could mean less of a property tax base, Blodreau said. That, in turn, would make it more difficult for local governments to generate revenue.

"In the long run, the best thing to do is bite the bullet," he said. That's because in the long run, rebuilding causes even more problems, Blodreau said.

Wednesday's conference came in the middle of the hurricane season, which runs through November, and just two days after Hurricane Bob skirted most of the East Coast before plowing into Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Bob's winds reached 125 mph at its height, and the storm has been blamed for 16 deaths and more than \$1 billion damage. Nearly 300,000 people still had no power on Wednesday.

A storm like Bob that inched its way up Florida's east coast and then moved inland could play havoc with evacuation efforts because of the

number of people who would be forced from their homes, emergency planners said.

"Where would all those people go?" Blodreau asked.

Hurricane Elena did something similar in 1985, striking up the Gulf coast and forcing about 165,000 people into shelters in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties. But the Tampa Bay area felt only a whisper of the storm's power.

"If you think you have been in a hurricane because of Elena, you're dead wrong," said Bob Taylor, director of emergency planning for Hillsborough County.

The last severe hurricane to hit Tampa Bay was a Category 3 storm in 1921 with wind speed of 111 mph to 130 mph.

A Category 3 hurricane today would send a 28-foot wall of water crashing into downtown Tampa. Water surges in excess of 20 feet would pummel most of the Pinellas coastline.

"They don't happen very often," Weather Channel meteorologist John Hope said of major hurricanes. "But they will happen again."

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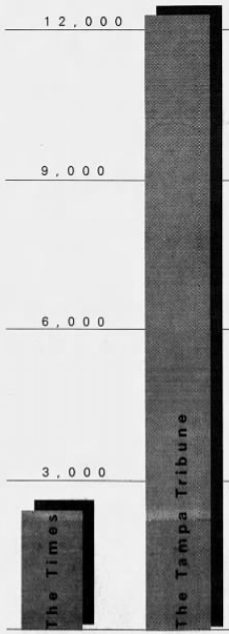
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