

Endicott, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today encouraged local residents to attend an upcoming public briefing on the latest findings of federal studies on the health impact of trichloroethylene (TCE). Federal officials will speak at a meeting organized by the Western Broome Environmental Stakeholder Coalition (WBESC) on Tuesday, May 27 at 6:30pm at First United Methodist Church located at 53 McKinley Avenue in Endicott, New York. Hinchey is expected to attend the meeting.

"I strongly encourage area residents to attend this important meeting on Tuesday to hear from trained federal and state scientists and health experts on the latest developments concerning studies on the health impact of TCE in the Endicott area," Hinchey said. "One of the big reasons I worked so hard to get these agencies involved in the TCE issue was so that the health concerns of residents would not be ignored. This meeting is a unique and important opportunity for residents to get answers to questions they may have on TCE."

The meeting of May 27 will consist of a finalization of health statistics review and status of the IBM worker's study Hinchey worked to authorize and fund last year. The presentation will be made by presented by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Drug Registry (ATSDR) on behalf of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

TCE, which has made its way into 400-500 homes in Hinchey's congressional district as a result of vapor intrusion, is widely recognized as a probable carcinogen. Six years ago, the EPA conducted a Health Risk Assessment, endorsed by its Science Advisory Board, that determined TCE to be 5 to 65 times more toxic than originally thought. The New York State Department of Health and ATSDR have released results from a series of health statistics review studies of residents exposed to TCE -- studies Hinchey fought to initiate -- that reveal increased rates of certain types of cancers, specifically kidney and testicular cancers, and congenital heart defects for people and infants living in the area of the Endicott TCE spill.

Hinchey has been the constant leader of efforts to clean-up TCE contamination in Endicott and hold all responsible parties accountable. In 2003, Hinchey had language included in a federal bill to have ATSDR conduct its health-risk study. The congressman has also pressed the New York State Department of Health to develop its own risk standards.

Last year, Hinchey also secured the backing of the Congress for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to conduct a new federal study on trichloroethylene (TCE) exposure and cancer rates among 28,000 IBM employees who worked at the company's Endicott site since 1964. That study is already beginning to get underway. Earlier this year, Hinchey introduced the Toxic Chemical Exposure (TCE) Reduction Act is designed to end the

Bush administration's stall tactics and require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to quickly develop health safety standards that will help improve the government's ability to protect public health from TCE

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Congressman Maurice D. Hinchey

The Endicott Chemical Contamination: A Chronology of Action

Trichloroethylene (TCE) is a suspected carcinogen and neurotoxin that's made its way into over 500 homes in New York's 22nd Congressional District, most notably in Endicott and Ithaca, due to vapor intrusion. In Endicott, TCE has been detected in an area encompassing over 300 acres, commonly referred to as "the plume." IBM's chemical spill in Endicott was first formally acknowledged by the company in 1979. The reporting of the 1979 leak prompted further investigations and disclosures that unveiled a history of releases by IBM dating back to 1940.

In 2002, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued new guidelines pertaining to vapor intrusion, which prompted new indoor air testing in Endicott. This testing began to reveal the extent of toxic contamination facing residents and the need for more action to protect public health. News reports of this contamination, particularly those conducted by the Press and Sun Bulletin in early spring of 2003, raised the profile of the problem. To ensure the protection of public health and the clean up of contaminated property, Congressman Hinchey begins a sustained effort in spring of 2003 to enlist the support, cooperation and active involvement of state and federal regulatory agencies.

April 2003

- Hinchey convenes a meeting in his Binghamton office with local municipal leaders and environmental remediation experts to gather information on what was known locally about the contamination.

May 2003

- Hinchey began pressing state and federal agencies to become more involved in the testing, remediation, and analysis of the chemical contamination in Endicott. In a series of letters to New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Health, Hinchey makes the case that the Endicott site must be reclassified to a higher priority on DEC's listing of Inactive Hazardous Waste sites, and that TCE must be more strictly regulated. Both agencies initially dismiss Hinchey's call for more aggressive action and vow to maintain the status quo with their handling of the situation. Hinchey continues to press for immediate action, particularly with DEC, but it is not until he raises awareness about the danger facing the community that the agencies start to act in a responsible manner.

July 2003

- Greater scientific focus was brought to bear on the Endicott spill after Hinchey calls a meeting in Washington with Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry's Assistant Administrator Henry Falk. Following that meeting Hinchey inserts a provision in the FY 2004 VA/HUD appropriation bill stating: "Within the amount provided, the Committee urges ATSDR to assist the New York State Department of Health, in consultation with community residents, in public health activities related to potential exposure to volatile organic compounds in the Village of Endicott, New York."
- This legislative effort prompts ATSDR to initiate a number of health studies in cooperation with NYSDOH. Reports by these agencies subsequently determined that Endicott residents have displayed elevated incidences of testicular cancer (twice the average level epidemiologists expected to find), kidney cancer (twice the expected rate), heart defects in newborns (2.5 times the expected rate), as well as low birth weights. The research is particularly noteworthy because for the first time it is stated, in black and white, that the high rate of certain illnesses, including cancer incidences, can not be attributed to chance alone.

September 2003

- Hinchey writes IBM's Vice President for Environmental Affairs urging full cooperation in sharing any and all information with federal regulatory agencies. IBM fails to respond.

October 2003

- Hinchey hosts U.S. Senator Clinton in Endicott to enlist her full support in efforts to address the public health, remediation, and regulation aspects of the TCE spill.

January 2004

- Hinchey organizes and hosts a public meeting at Union-Endicott High School to present the public with expert advice from renowned environmental health and legal experts. At this meeting Dr. Leo Trasande of Mt Sinai Children's Hospital explains how children are more susceptible because, pound for pound, they ingest more chemicals in the food they eat, water they drink, and air they breathe. He also provides a sobering assessment of toxicity of TCE, its suspected links to cancer, birth defects, kidney and liver failure, and damage to the central nervous system.

February 2004

- Hinchey prevails in his efforts to get NYS DEC to reclassify the Endicott site from Class 4 to Class 2 on the state's list of inactive hazardous waste site; the new classification brings greater resources and oversight to the remediation efforts. DEC begins negotiation of a new Consent Order with IBM.

August 2004

- IBM and DEC agree to a new Consent Order, which had been mysteriously missing for over 20 years. It serves as a binding road map for clean up – which primarily involves as system of pumping and filtering ground water. To date, over 100,000 gallons of toxic chemicals have been removed from ground water through this process.

November 2004

- At Hinchey's request, the NYS Assembly holds an official hearing in Endicott on TCE vapor intrusion. This hearing prompts further state action, including new TCE guidelines from DOH and pending legislation requiring landlords to notify tenants about TCE.

February 2005

- Hinchey writes the commissioner of NYS DOH to share information and evidence in support of lowering the state's 5 microgram/cubic meter guideline for TCE (set in October 2003).

May 2005

- Hinchey prevails in getting language in the FY 2006 appropriations bill for EPA directing the agency to consider, among other factors, the 2001 Human Health Risk Assessment's provisional screening levels, which was approved by the EPA's Science Advisory Board, when developing an interim approach to screening for TCE. That 2001 report called for more stringent safeguards in light of more recent data analysis showing the increased danger of TCE. Hinchey also encourages EPA to keep the House Appropriations Committee apprised of 1) progress made on the development and implementation of interim procedures, 2) actions at the contaminated sites, and 3) the completion of a new EPA risk assessment for TCE.

September 2005

- Hinchey writes the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations

Subcommittee on Water and Environment urging them to hold a hearing on TCE toxicity standards.

February 2006

- Hinchey writes NYSDOH to urge immediate action to lower the states TCE guideline.

April 2006

- Hinchey writes NYSDOH and DEC to urge them to improve the manner in which the agencies notify the public about toxic chemical spills -- in light of a chemical spill that occurred in January in Endicott. Additionally, Hinchey urges the initiation of a more aggressive policy regarding the installation of mitigation systems for properties threatened by volatile organic chemicals.

August 2006

- Hinchey again writes NYS DOH to urge immediate action to lower the state's TCE guideline.

June 2007

- At Hinchey's direction, House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee adds funds to its FY 2008 Appropriations bill for EPA's Office of Research and Development and inserts language in the Committee Report directing EPA to use those increases to expedite the new TCE risk assessment, as advised by the National Research Council's report in 2006. Hinchey language also requires EPA to provide periodic updates on their progress.

July 2007

- In the FY 2008 Budget Hinchey places language to fund a worker health study to be conducted by NIOSH. Previously, NIOSH determined that it is scientifically feasible to conduct a cancer study among former IBM workers at IBM's Endicott site. The study was deemed feasible because NIOSH found that sufficient data exists on employee health – specifically cancer incidence and mortality rates. Records on 28,000 employees who worked for IBM at the site since 1964 form the basis of the study.

Specifically, Hinchey had the following put in the bill -- which passed the House on July 19, 2007 by a vote of 276-140: The committee continues to be pleased with the progress of research and the translation of that research into practice under the national occupational research agenda. Within the funding provided, the committee encourages NIOSH to continue its study of former manufacturing workers through the initiation of a cancer incidence and mortality study within this population.

March 2008

- Hinchey introduces the TCE Reduction Act. This legislation directs the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to quickly develop health safety standards to improve the government's ability to protect public health from TCE. Among other things, the TCE Reduction Act requires EPA to publish a health advisory, within 180 days of the enactment of the bill, for TCE that fully protects the health of susceptible populations (including pregnant women, infants, and children). This bill requires EPA to account for body weight (children are more susceptible); all exposure patterns; and all routes of exposure, particularly vapor intrusion, which occurs when TCE-contaminated soils release vapors that enter homes, threatening residents' health and reducing property values in communities living above TCE plumes. The measure also requires EPA to promulgate a national primary drinking water regulation (no later than 1 year after enactment for the proposed regulation and no later than 18 months after enactment for the final standard).

April 2008

- At Hinchey's and US Representative John Hall's suggestion, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee holds a field hearing in Hopewell Junction to gather information about TCE contamination in Upstate New York. Hinchey submits comments for the record regarding

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Sunday, 25 May 2008 19:00

the Endicott toxic spill and the TCE Reduction Act.