

CTS sued by Asheville neighbors

Plaintiffs seek pollution cleanup

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SKYLAND — Residents living near the former CTS of Asheville Superfund site on Mills Gap Road filed a lawsuit against the company, alleging it is a continuous nuisance.

The 25 residents claim chemicals at the site formerly owned by the Indiana-based company are contaminating the air, land and water in their neighborhoods, causing their property values to drop and making them afraid for their health and safety.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Asheville on Tuesday.

“They have created a disaster by leaving their private property, waste and waste materials on the site,” said resident Tate MacQueen. “One of the outcomes that we want to see as a community is the damage to be fixed with the proper cleanup compelled by the actions in this suit.”

Residents living near the site have been dealing with contamination at and around the former plant for more than a decade.

CTS manufactured industrial switches and resistors at the site for nearly 30 years before closing in 1987. Chemicals used at the site, including trichloroethylene, or TCE, have been found in high concentrations at the site and in nearby drinking water wells. Calls to CTS Wednesday were not immediately returned.

The residents want CTS to clean up the toxic chemicals, remediate any harm caused by them and pay them for all losses and damages they have suffered or will suffer in the future, although the complaint does not list a monetary value. MacQueen said he expects it to be in the “multimillion-dollar range.” He said residents are not suing CTS for the money but rather to expedite cleanup at the site.

“It is all about safeguarding our community,” he said. “We are the ones that live there, drive by it and worry about it every day.”

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has been involved in cleaning up the site since the 1990s. The site is being considered this year for inclusion on the national priorities list, the highest level of federal action that could be undertaken for a Superfund site.

A previous lawsuit filed by residents against CTS was settled out of court, but MacQueen said residents have new information for the current suit that shows the company mishandled toxic waste and withheld information about it.

He said court action could get the site cleaned up faster than federal government actions. Residents are also wary of the EPA, which they say has mishandled contamination problems at the former plant site.