

Janet Snoyer, Ithaca Resident

Since June of 2004, my residential community has relied on information provided by DEC and Emerson. Since the first round of testing, I have experienced a progressive shutdown in communication. People who live in communities where there is any chance of vapor intrusion in their homes need information. We are getting information filtered through a lot of self-protective lenses at this point, making the information itself seriously distorted, and we cannot use it to protect our own self-interest. One example of poorly communicated information is the DEC site map, where privacy rationale prevented us from detecting a pattern to indoor test results.

After the indoor air in my home was tested, and high levels of contamination were found, I was offered a mitigation system, which was installed in January 2005. Since the installation of the remediation system, much has gone wrong. For five weeks I have had standing water in my basement for the first time in 21 years. In addition, the fan that provides the vacuum to pull the vapors out from the house has failed after only three months and needs to be replaced. I cannot help but wonder: why did it fail so soon?

Economists have studied the effect of chemical contamination on property values. Housing prices go down and, until the contamination is cleaned up, they stay down. Will any potential economic impact be reflected in an overall NYS assessment of the problem of vapor intrusion?

People don't want to raise families in these houses. They are most likely to sell to people who want to rent them out to others. We have disclosure laws that require me to inform a potential buyer of what I know about contamination problems with the house, but is a landlord required to inform tenants?

I have a 24-year-old daughter. I bought the house when she was three, and she began preschool. Throughout elementary and middle school, her academic reports and evaluations repeated the same theme: smart girl, poor student—although she wants to, it seems she cannot focus, cannot concentrate, does not listen, does not complete assignments, is very slow at her work. In the summer between ninth and tenth grade, she told me that she couldn't continue to participate in school this way, that she loved her artistic pursuits. She begged me to let her apply to a performing arts boarding high school. She was accepted and I used a second mortgage on my house to pay for the school. On her first report card she received a B+ in creative writing and A's in the other subjects. There was no mention of an inability to concentrate. That was the last grade below an A that she would receive in her schooling. She took the most advanced and rigorous academic subjects offered by the school, went on to college at Brandeis University, completed two majors and two minors, and graduated summa cum laude with highest honors.

I never understood the seemingly instant transformation. Then last summer at the DEC's first meeting, which coincided with a visit home by my daughter, where the cognitive impairment effects of TCE exposure were listed, she leaned over and whispered to me, "that was me in elementary and middle school." If I had known that TCE vapors were present in our home, that information certainly would have entered my problem solving process in trying to help my daughter succeed in school.