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DEC to crack down on Valhalla school dumpers

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VALHALLA — A state Department of Environmental Conservation spokeswoman yesterday announced the agency would crack down on dumpers who brought thousands of truckloads of dirt and debris to a Valhalla school yard in 2002 in the district's fill-for-fields project.

DEC spokeswoman Maureen Wren said the department was working with school officials to identify the parties who dumped there. She said the dumpers could be required to help clean up contaminants found at the site.

Two baseball fields were created on top of the fill. They are adjacent to district headquarters and Kensico School on Columbus Avenue.

"We are committed to holding polluters responsible," Wren said. "We need to consider whatever steps might be needed to protect public health and the environment."

The announcement came four days after The Journal News reported that soil samples taken in July 2004 found elevated concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, a chemical commonly found in urban soils. The DEC received the results 10 months ago, documents show.

Formed from the incomplete burning of organic substances, PAHs cause cancer in animals and are "probable" causes of cancer in humans, according to the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. They are not regulated, though New York issues guidelines for the cleanup of toxic waste sites.

Parent John Fitzgerald, who has waged a one-man fight against the project, welcomed intervention from Albany.

"It's a good first step," he said. "Now, I want to know how much the dumpers made by dumping on our school property."

The project was conceived by Phyllis Fitzpatrick of Goodwill Sports Association, who approached then-schools Superintendent Tom Kelly and the Board of Education. She convinced them to allow haulers to dump dirt and debris from local construction projects in exchange for donations from the haulers to defray the cost of the high school's new artificial turf field.

Anthony Adinolfi, owner of Dirtman Enterprises Inc. of Mahopac, told The Journal News in 2003 that Fitzpatrick instructed him to give her a "donation" from money he collected from the dumpers. He declined to say how much he received or gave to Fitzpatrick.

"Whatever I was supposed to give, I gave, up and above," he said. "When I started, the only thing I was supposed to do was kick back, donate."

Neither Kelly, Fitzpatrick nor Adinolfi returned phone messages yesterday. Also not returning phone messages was Valhalla Superintendent Diane Ramos-Kelly.

Wren said the DEC would move forward as it has done in Eastchester and Greenburgh, where it cited dirt haulers for setting up unpermitted landfills in similar projects. According to state law, a landfill for construction and demolition debris could operate without a state permit as long as it accepted only material such as concrete, asphalt pavement, brick and glass. To qualify for the exemption, however, the property owner may not accept any money or services in exchange for receiving the material.
