

# Panel to study why tainted park stayed open 30 years

High arsenic levels found at Swann Park in 1976

BY TOM PELTON  
[SUN REPORTER]

5-8-2007  
[1] B

Mayor Sheila Dixon is forming a task force to investigate why Swann Park in South Baltimore remained open for 30 years despite studies showing high levels of arsenic in the soil there.

"The community deserves to know why the park is the focus of our attention in 2007 and not much sooner," Dixon said in announcing the panel yesterday.

The city Health Department closed the park last month after tests showed arsenic in the soil at more than 100 times safe levels. The testing was done after Honeywell International Inc. released documents from 1976 showing high arsenic levels at that time.

A state task force had assured neighborhood residents that both the park and the old chemical company next door had been cleaned up.

The Swann Park Task Force will be chaired by the city health commissioner, Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein. Serving with him will be Lynn R. Goldman, a professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; Heather A. Moore, president of the Federal Hill South Neighborhood Association; George A. Nilson, the  
[Please see ARSENIC, 8B]

# Panel to investigate why city did not close tainted park

**ARSENIC** [From Page 1B]

city solicitor; and Stuart O. Simms, former Baltimore state's attorney.

The panel's scientific adviser will be Thomas A. Burke of the school of public health. Rena Steinzor, a professor of environmental law at the University of Maryland law school, will be legal adviser.

Swann Park is a rectangle of green along the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River that is popular among children's sports leagues. Next to the park, an Allied Chemi-

**"THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT THING TO UNDERSTAND."**

DR. JOSHUA M. SHARFSTEIN

cal Co. plant manufactured arsenic-based pesticides, as well as DDT and kepone, until it closed in 1976.

The former factory site was covered in asphalt, but chemicals began leaking out of the cap. As part of discussions with the state over repairing that cap, Honeywell, the New Jersey-based company that merged with Allied in 1999, turned over last month the old documents with the results of company tests showing high arsenic levels in the park.

After closing the park, Sharfstein demanded to know if the company's test results from 1976 were kept secret.

But a Johns Hopkins researcher, Dr. Genevieve Matanoski, pointed out that she had also documented high arsenic levels in Swann Park in the 1970s. She said the government knew about the arsenic in the park but that nobody acted on the warning.

Matanoski linked arsenic dust blowing off of Allied plant railroad cars to a three-times normal lung cancer death rate in the neighborhood surrounding Swann Park.

Matanoski's report, which was funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, was published in the journal *Environmental Research* in 1981, presented to the EPA and discussed at a conference of the American Public Health Association.

Sharfstein said the task force will investigate why the city didn't act on Matanoski's 1981 report. "Dr. Matanoski has agreed to meet with the task force and walk us through who she was in contact with at the time," Sharfstein said. "This is a very important thing to understand."

One goal, he said, is to determine if some new city policies or laws are needed to prevent similar breakdowns in communication.

Said Steinzor, "There was a public health concern here, and of course people should have been paying attention to it."

On April 24, the Maryland Department of the Environment gave the city and Honeywell 30 days to come up with a plan to clean up Swann Park, either by removing or burying the arsenic. Federal health investigators have been asked to determine if the element, a carcinogen, posed a risk to children playing in the park or living in the neighborhood.

tom.pelton@baltsun.com

**All Market Packs**  
**BUY 4 GET 1 MORE FREE!**



**MID-WEEK SPECIAL:**  
 Every Tuesday,  
 Wednesday &  
 Thursday!

**TOP QUALITY MARYLAND GROWN PLANTS!**

**WATSON'S GARDEN CENTER**  
 410-321-7300  
 1620 York Rd., Lutherville  
 www.watsonsgarden.com