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## Selectmen Told:

# Tissue Plant Trying To Find Walloomsac Pollution Answer

Bennington selectmen Tuesday night received a first-hand report from a representative of the Vermont Tissue Paper Co. Inc. on the firm's efforts to find a practical answer to the problem of contamination of the Walloomsac River caused by the discharge of the tissue-making plant's process water into the stream.

Atty. Francis E. Morrissey, a spokesman for the special creditors' committee now managing the firm, appeared in response to a letter from selectmen protesting continued pollution of the stream by the company.

He told the board that the company has introduced equipment

which effectively screens out small paper fibers from the process waste. This, he indicated, had been one of the major contaminants. The remaining problem is the elimination of fine clay particles which are held in suspension, causing discoloration of the river when process water is discharged into it. This, Morrissey said, is a problem faced by many paper-making companies and one for which there is as yet no known practical solution. "The only solution," he said, "to take care of this quickly would be to close the plant down."

Selectmen indicated they did not want that to happen, but told Morrissey that the continuing contamination caused by the tissue plant "puts us in a bad position." "Others," said Selectman Richard Van Santvoord, "who should be eliminating their pollution of the stream say to us 'why should we clean up when that industrial plant can get away without doing so.'"

A major point of contention concerning the contamination is whether it has a toxic effect on the stream's plant and fish life. In an article appearing about two years ago, The Banner quoted Merrill Hohman, sanitary engineer for the Water Resources Board, which has responsibility for the state's, anti-pollution program, to the effect that the pollution problem posed by the tissue-making plant is essentially only that of the river's unsightly appearance. The waste material, according to The Banner interview with Hohman, is of an inorganic nature which does not seriously injure the stream's properties of purity and oxygen content. The Banner has since repeated in subsequent articles this assessment of the situation made by the Water Resources Board.

Morrissey, at Tuesday night's meeting, indicated that he had been given to understand from Water Resources Commissioner Reinhold W. Thieme himself that the plant's process wastes are of a non-toxic nature.

This viewpoint, however, has

possibly through an electrolytic process — but that such solutions of the problem are "very expensive." But he felt strongly that the plant shouldn't be allowed to undo the progress on stream clean-up brought about through the town's sewage treatment plant.

Morrissey indicated to selectmen that the firm is making a continuing effort to find an economical solution to the problem. Among other things, he said, he was in touch with Sanford Lyons, a former Benningtonian now working in Georgia who is an expert on industrial processes involving clays. Lyons, he indicated, has been sent samples of the plant's process waste effluent and is expected to sound out other experts on possible ways of dealing with the problem.

"There is nobody who would like to see this thing cleaned up more than I," Morrissey stated at one point, noting that he had been chairman of the Water Resources Board when the original order calling for the depollution of the Walloomsac had been signed.

After listening to Morrissey, selectmen told him they would be in a better position to answer residents concerned with the stream's contamination if they had a letter from Thieme stating that the tissue firm was working on the problem and that there would be a solution found in "the reasonably near future." Selectmen also said they would want the statement to say that the contamination from the industry is not harmful to the stream's fish life. Morrissey said he would take up the matter of such a statement with Thieme the next time he sees him.

Selectmen noted that they had had a long letter on the Vermont Tissue matter from Thieme about a year ago but that it "didn't really say anything."

This viewpoint, however, has been seriously challenged by John F. Wohlnus, a biologist at Bennington College. In a recent letter to The Banner, Wohlnus said the build-up of fine clay particles on the bottom of the stream has in effect smothered the growth of algae and other aquatic plants. The absence of such growth in turn prevents or interrupts entire food cycles of various animal life. In sum, Wohlnus said, the fine silt "creates an intolerable condition in so far as the biology of the stream is concerned."

This morning Wohlnus told The Banner of an exchange of correspondence with Thieme. In one of his letters, Wohlnus mentioned the assessment of the contamination attributed by The Banner to the Water Resources Board. In a reply, Thieme commented of The Banner articles that their "source is unknown and at best must assuredly be taken out of context."

Wohlnus went on to say this morning that several sportsmen have told him that the stream below the plant is now "dead" and that fish once taken from the stream are no longer there.

He said there are ways in which the suspended clays can be removed from the process waters — either by settling them out in large holding basins or