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Beazer is committed to a methodical and scientific remedy

A Feb. 23 Sun editorial concerned the Cabot Carbon/Koppers Superfund Site located in the city at NW 23rd Ave. Main Street. Ron Cunningham, the Sun's editorial editor, opines that Beazer East, Inc. "has a vested interest in protecting its corporate bottom line." On this point I agree with Cunningham. However, he continues by implying that this "vested interest" is affecting Beazer's behavior to the detriment of Gainesville's drinking water supply. On this point I adamantly disagree. The truth is quite to the contrary.

Beazer East, Inc., as the former owner of the Koppers wood treatment plant, is responsible for the environmental obligations on the Koppers portion of the Cabot Carbon/Koppers Site that result from pre-1989 operations there. Beazer has been conducting the remediation of this property under the authority of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in accordance with the federal Superfund program. Beazer sold the plant to Koppers, Inc., in 1988 and Koppers, Inc. continues to operate a wood-treating facility at the site today.

As Beazer's Environmental Manager for this site, I am responsible for working with all parties involved to complete a thorough evaluation and to implement an appropriate remedy. A methodical and scientific approach to this work is important to develop a remedy that adequately considers all of the site conditions. This approach is imperative in order to avoid implementing a remedy that may actually make the situation worse. And it is easy to envision how this could happen. The site's naturally occurring geology has prevented the Floridan Aquifer from being seriously affected by the most heavily impacted material found in the more shallow layers of the site. Drilling, pumping or implementing many other well-intentioned actions at the site can easily disrupt this natural balance and inadvertently mobilize material into the Floridan Aquifer.

Yes, Beazer "has a vested interest in protecting its corporate bottom line," and that is exactly why we cannot afford to be wrong about the extent of impacts to the Floridan Aquifer, or rush to implement any remedial measures at the site that may exacerbate those impacts.

Beazer's interests and responsibilities at the Koppers site are timeless. The decisions we are making today must consider the implications 100 years into the future. Trying to save a few dollars today by ignoring any real problem at the site that may in the long-run have the enormous consequences of impacting Gainesville's drinking water supply would simply defy logic. No corporation can afford to be that shortsighted. And I would be doing a disservice to Beazer in my role as an Environmental Manager if I ignored the long-term implications of any actions taken now.

Cunningham's editorial goes further in attempting to discredit Beazer's actions by stating

that "This is the same company, of course, that dismissed as unnecessary GRU's insistence on sinking additional monitoring wells to track the contamination." This statement is simply untrue. The record clearly shows that Beazer has not "dismissed as unnecessary" the idea of installing additional Floridan Aquifer monitoring wells. What Beazer opposed was drilling new monitoring wells too close to the site's source areas where there is a tremendous risk of mobilizing material into the Floridan Aquifer. We proposed instead to avoid that risk by drilling new wells at the site's boundaries away from the risk of exacerbating conditions, but still in position to provide early detection of any impacts that might reach the Murphree Wellfield over two miles away.

And what is to be made of GRU's vested interest in this situation? Cunningham opines that GRU's responsibility to deliver clean water to the citizens of Gainesville means "GRU's vested interest is more compelling." I respectfully disagree. GRU has no downside in being wrong with its weakly-supported claims that site impacts may reach the Murphree Wellfield in 4 to 5 years. Beazer bears the responsibility and cost of ensuring that any historic impacts at the Koppers Site never impact the Murphree Wellfield. If GRU forces the Environmental Protection Agency to demand that an unwarranted remedy be implemented at the site, the EPA will look to Beazer, not to GRU, to pay for it. If that unwarranted remedy exacerbates conditions, does GRU step in and foot the bill? No, Beazer will continue to be expected to pay those increased costs.

To date, our experienced technical experts have been working diligently to complete a thorough evaluation and to implement an appropriate remedy for the Koppers Site that ensures Gainesville's drinking water supply remains forever unaffected by any historic Site impacts. This approach is dictated by Beazer's "vested interest in protecting its corporate bottom line," and is entirely consistent with the best interests of GRU and the citizens of Gainesville. I am hopeful that all stakeholders will see the wisdom in allowing this approach to continue.

The closing line of Cunningham's editorial states that "Gainesville water consumers can't afford the fiscal or public health consequences if GRU turns out to be right and Beazer wrong." Simply put, neither can we.

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