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Staff photos by Sidney Thoms

Standing near Woodward Avenue and Murphy Road are (from left) Mary McIlvain, Karen Gormley, Roy Gagnard and Gilbert Regaldo, all of Woodridge, who testified in an IEPA hearing seeking an injunction against E.C. Rizzi & Associates Inc., owner of a waste transfer site just west of the intersection in Bollingbrook. Area residents have said bad odors and particulate matter can be detected in the air.

Raising a stink

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Residents want waste site closed

By Don Grigas
dgrigas@libertysuburban.com

More than 30 Woodridge residents who oppose the operation of a land waste transfer station near Murphy Road and Woodward Avenue attended a status hearing Tuesday, in Joliet, as part of a lawsuit filed last year by the office of the Illinois attorney general, and most say they plan to return Monday, Aug. 6, to see if the courts will finally shutter the business.

The 12-count lawsuit was filed Aug. 24, 2006, in Will County Circuit Court against E.C. Rizzi & Associates Inc. — which bills itself as a landscape waste transfer site — and seeks an injunction to close the business as well as a minimum \$600,000 in damages.

At the July 24 hearing, Judge Bobbi Petrungaro dismissed a motion by the Illinois attorney general asking for a preliminary injunction hearing, and set the next hearing for 10 a.m. Aug. 6.

"We just wanted to make sure the judge understood the importance of this case by showing how many people are being impacted by the waste site being operated by Mr. Rizzi near our homes," said Karen Gormley, member of Citizens Opposed to Dump Expansion.

Gormley is among a group of residents who live east and north of the site in the Farmingdale Village subdivision who have opposed the operation of the business since E.C. Rizzi & Associates Inc. sought a special permit in September 2006 from the village of Bolingbrook to authorize subdividing the 17-acre site and some code variances.

After residents voiced opposition to the plan, Rizzi withdrew the request.

Gormley, who attended the hearing July 24, said most residents will only be satisfied when the business is shut down.

"Maybe in the past we would have been happy just to not have to smell the awful smells emanating from the site, but at this point we just want to see it go away," Gormley said.

Mary McIlvain, another Woodridge resident who attended the hearing, said Rizzi has repeatedly failed to comply with IEPA regulations and can no longer be trusted to comply with state laws designed to protect citizens.

"The IEPA has issued 140 citations for lack of compliance to the business. Part of the issue now is trust because Mr. Rizzi has demonstrated that he won't regulate his own business and the village of Bolingbrook won't do it either. It's been up to the people to do what is necessary to bring this issue to a head," McIlvain said.

Rizzi did not return calls made to his cell phone by The Reporter.

The site is located east of the North-South Tollway in Bolingbrook, but is bordered by Woodridge residential subdivisions to the east and is within a few hundred yards of other residential subdivisions to the north and northeast.

Gormley said representatives from the attorney general's office will conduct interviews with residents over the next two weeks and record them as testimony for use in the Aug. 6 hearing.

Last year, residents complained that odors from fertilizer and other materials stored on the site were having a negative impact on the quality of life for people living near the site and posed potential health risks.

"When the wind blows from the south or southwest, particularly in the summer, it brings the odors right into our backyards," said McIlvain.

Gormley said subdivision residents are

being held hostage to the smells when the wind blows from the southwest and often have to keep windows closed and remain indoors.

"We just bought an outdoor set of furniture, and we can't use it when we want to because of the smell," Gormley said.

She also said residents are cautious about going outdoors because of the potential for mold spores and other issues related to clean air.

"They grind concrete and stone there, and on windy days you can actually feel the granules and particulate matter in the air, coming down on your skin, cars and other surfaces," Gormley said.

Since the lawsuit was filed last year there has been no decline in the activity at the site, which is accessible only from Woodward Avenue, residents said.

"I have personally seen truckloads of manure and fertilizer going into the site, and that is not a permitted material for what his business is licensed," said Gormley. "I've visited Third World countries, and I have to say the worst smells I have encountered are right here in my own backyard," Gormley said.

Gilbert Regalado said he is concerned for the health of his children, and said he is one of several residents who will provide testimony for the next hearing.

"I've filed a complaint with the IEPA as well," Regalado said.

Roy Gagnard, another Farmingdale resident, said "the smell is as bad as the old Chicago Stockyards."

The Web site for the business advertises that it accepts landscape waste and recycling materials such as leaves, grass clippings, sod, wood chips, clean concrete, paving bricks, pallets and "clean" wood waste. It sells black dirt, compost, mulch, gravel and "organic yard waste compost."

Over the past two years the Will County Land Use Department, acting as an agent for the IEPA, has cited the business on numerous occasions for violations and noncompliance with laws for storing waste materials.