

Local responders can't handle an ethanol accident

By Ryan Phillips

Local emergency responders do not possess the specialized equipment to deal with an accident involving a tanker truck holding hazardous chemicals that is coming from or going to the proposed ethanol plant in Conoy Township, said Tom Brill, Marietta Pioneer Fire Company chief.

Brill, who has seven years of experience as a hazardous materials technician, said the 8,000-gallon nurse trucks that will be shipping hazardous materials like ammonia along Route 441 are an accident waiting to happen. Even more disturbing, added Brill, is that local fire companies like Maytown and Marietta are being kept out of the loop by county emergency management officials on response and evacuation plans.

"They better let us know what's going on," Brill told council at last week's meeting.

Through an ongoing conditional use process, Penn-Mar Ethanol is seeking to convince Conoy Township supervisors and residents from York and Lancaster counties that the proposed \$80 million refinery located off the Susquehanna River would benefit the area.

Opposition to the plant, which would be built near the county incinerator and convert corn to a fuel additive, has come from all angles, with concerns over pollution, noise, odor and the potential for disasters like ones pointed out by Brill.

He explained that Marietta is within the 10-mile evacuation area should a spill occur.

However, county emergency management officials have only discussed disaster scenarios with the Bainbridge Fire Company, which Brill noted could not handle a major hazardous material spill or an ethanol-related fire.

"The possibilities for a major problem are there," commented Brill, a hazardous materials regional manager for the Harrisburg-Carlisle district.

It would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to acquire the foam needed to remedy a chemical spill, said Brill. The only piece of apparatus Marietta's fire department has that would help in fighting a fire at the plant itself is out of date and on the list for replacement.

Essex Street resident Bruce Gibson, who has publicly opposed the proposed plant on several fronts, noted even if a cleanup of a spill would be conducted, that the area's ground water table and the river could still be contaminated. Brill confirmed Gibson's statements regarding the potential for disaster.

"It (contamination) would go all the way to the Chesapeake Bay," he said.

Furthermore, the stretch of Route 441 the tanker trucks would be using at a rate of 956 trips per week is located in a watershed supply area, said Gibson.