

The six day Watertown Tire Recyclers (WTR) fire that started on July 19, 2005 is not easily forgotten. The billowing smoke from this avoidable disaster was visible from space via satellite cameras, and to the naked eye from as far away as Illinois. As we approach the fire's anniversary, we should acknowledge the efforts of the many agencies and individuals who together put out that horrible fire in just six days. This includes not just the firefighters, but also the public works, traffic safety, and emergency rescue workers who worked to contain the fire's impact and keep the public as safe as it could be in a very dangerous situation.

We should also acknowledge citizens who organized themselves to try to head off the danger of a fire in the first place, and then to ensure that the mess from the fire was not just left on site. Two months before the fire Citizens for a Safe Environment, made up of ordinary local citizens, filed a lawsuit warning specifically of the danger of a fire and trying to push WTR to operate within the limits of its permit. Citizens were forced to act on their own because the DNR failed to control WTR in spite of numerous complaints and full knowledge of the degree to which WTR was violating its limits.

We estimate WTR had exceeded its legal limit for the number of tires on site by a factor of about 6. Imagine what would happen to anybody if they were driving six times the speed limit. Yet WTR was allowed to continue to accumulate tires until the disaster.

For neighbors of WTR, some of whom were driven from their homes by the fire, and who had already had to live with continuously accumulating mounds of tires at the site, the last year has been filled with many hours of attending meetings, petitioning officials, researching public documents and many, many phone calls to make sure that this mess gets cleaned up (not covered up), and most importantly that it doesn't happen again.

We are very grateful to the Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager for creatively finding a way to get money from settlement of the State's enforcement lawsuit directed to local agencies that had responded to the fire. Without her willingness to be creative in this way, the local communities would have likely been stuck with the entire fire-response bill, or mired in years of litigation. While we are disappointed that WTR was able to escape fully reimbursing firefighters, getting some compensation soon for the local responders is better than leaving them to have to fight for years in the legal system. The Attorney General, and Assistant Attorney General JoAnne Kloppenburg, worked to find, and found, a way to get them that compensation.

We appreciate as well the Executive Board of Dodge County, its supervisors, and attorneys for their support of our effort to ensure that clean-up of the tire fire residue was required as part of that settlement. We also thank Senator Fitzgerald and Representative Kleefisch for similarly insisting that the toxic materials left behind at the fire were removed rather than just covered in clay, as was initially proposed by the DNR.

Copies of the State's Complaint against WTR, LLC and Thomas Springer, the Stipulation (settlement) and Judgment are all public record and can be read at [www.watertowntirefire.com](http://www.watertowntirefire.com) by selecting the documents tab. There you will also find the names of the fire companies that worked those long hours in our time of need.

Our highest praise is reserved for citizens who made the many very real sacrifices of personal time necessary to support our demands for accountability and for clean-up of the fire residue at the property.

Lastly we would like to recognize the incredible job of our Attorney, Frank Jablonski and his staff at the Progressive Law Group in Madison.

An important lesson from the fire is that we must take action as citizens to protect our environment and community. It is only when we act together and hold our elected and public officials accountable can we be assured that our needs and well being will be considered. We are looking forward to closure of this issue through the timely removal of the contaminated soil piles, the financial payments outlined in the settlement, the return of the WTR land to agricultural uses, and the cessation of all tire related and non-agricultural related activities no later than May 15th, 2010

Sincerely,

Citizens For a Safe Environment