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Ex-pollution control chief criticizes recovery efforts

Pegors says finding barrels should be top priority

By Julie Gravelle
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A former state official blasted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Friday, claiming it isn't putting enough priority on finding barrels dumped in Lake Superior 30 years ago.

Although the project is one of 200 sites in Minnesota and Wisconsin named by the Department of Defense for cleanup, it isn't a priority because the barrels aren't known to contain hazardous substances, said Ken Gardner, public affairs officer for the corps' St. Paul district.

Corps officials say the barrels contain scrap metal, but rumors suggest they could contain toxic wastes or other hazardous materials.

"The cleanup costs would be infinitesimal compared with the potential contamination of the world's largest body of fresh water," said John Pegors, former head of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Duluth regional office. "I think this is a terrible



John Pegors

priority. It seems to me your top brass are asleep at the switch or they don't know the value of the lake out there."

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports indicate the bar-

rels could contain heavy metals and depleted uranium, which Honeywell used in some of its defense work. The corps conducted an unsuccessful search for the barrels in the late 1970s.

If the barrels do contain hazardous waste, the resulting cleanup would be placed on a Department of Defense list whose funds are restricted, Gardner said.

The search should be overseen by EPA or PCA officials, and workers should be trained in hazardous materials recovery, Pegors said.

Hazard Control Inc. of Minneapolis is being paid \$16,950 for the weeklong underwater search. The company is using four boats equipped with sonar, video cameras and magnetometers. A submarine is to be added Sunday.

Video released from Thursday's search revealed the lake bottom and some logs, but no barrels. The sonar detected 40 to 50 targets that could be barrels, and workers returned to those areas Friday, Gardner said.