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## Suit claims Watchtower site contaminated

WARWICK - The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is suing International Nickel and several of its affiliates, which it accuses of contaminating land where the religious group is now building its massive 1.6 million-square-foot world headquarters.

The 252-acre property on Kings Drive was previously owned by International Nickel, which operated a research and development site and a foundry there between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s. Watchtower, better known as Jehovah's Witnesses, purchased the property in 2009.

In the lawsuit, filed in federal court in New York's Southern District, Watchtower says International Nickel operated a wastewater treatment plant at the site to handle effluent, and also owned underground tanks to store fuel and other hazardous material.

Watchtower claims that International Nickel discharged petroleum, including oils containing polychlorinated byphenyls - or PCBs - into the wastewater treatment plant, and into the soil and groundwater, thereby contaminating the environment at the property. PCBs, which are probable human carcinogens, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, were banned in the United States in 1979.

Watchtower is in the process of building offices, apartments to house 1,000 adults, a cafeteria, a vehicle-maintenance building, an infirmary and a parking garage in Warwick. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2016.

Watchtower's lawsuit says International Nickel failed to clean up the environmental problems it created during decades in Warwick. The suit also names International Nickel's parent company, Vale Americas Inc., and its affiliates, including Vale Canada Limited, Precision Castparts Corp., and Special Metals Corporation.

Watchtower could not immediately be reached for comment. A spokesman for Vale said the company hadn't been served yet and therefore had no comment.

It wasn't clear when Watchtower discovered the contamination. The suit says Watchtower contacted the state Department of Environmental Conservation about the pollution in 2012 and '13, and has been cleaning the property under the direction of the DEC.

Watchtower is seeking unspecified reimbursement for the cost it has incurred in the cleanup and remediation. It is also seeking damages, restitution and attorney fees.

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The Watchtower headquarters on Long Meadow Road in the Town of Warwick. John DeSanto/Times Herald-Record

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