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NEWS

Valve report alarms mayor

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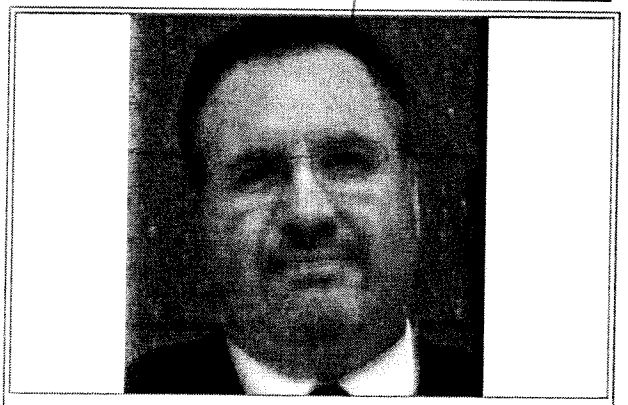

Mayor Mark Evans

Investigation of American Valve site reveals presence of toxins

By Colin DeVries
Hudson-Catskill Newspapers
Published: Saturday, January 9, 2010 2:16 AM EST

COXSACKIE — Though the remediation work of the American Valve Superfund site in the village was thought complete, a recent letter announcing intent to test the area for potentially airborne toxins has ignited erstwhile anxieties.

A recent investigation into the 15.5-acre former American Valve manufacturing site at 170 Mansion St., revealed that groundwater and unsaturated soil in the area showed the presence of potentially dangerous toxins formerly used as cleaning agents.

The investigation was conducted by the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the state Department of Health during the summer of 2009, revealing traces of four volatile organic compounds in the groundwater and in the soil, as a vapor. Those chemicals are trichloroethene (TCE), tetrachloroethene (PCE), dicholorethene (DCE) and vinyl chloride (VC), all of which can be harmful in concentrated doses and are suspected carcinogens.

A DEC letter sent to residents living near the site stated that further testing of air quality would need to be done. The air sampling is proposed for this winter heating season, though no dates have yet been established. The testing will be done beneath home foundations and in the basement, or lowest leve,l of residences.

The intent of the sampling is to determine if the volatile compounds have migrated from the groundwater and affected the indoor air of residences, a process called soil vapor intrusion.

Mayor Mark Evans had just recently received a copy of the DEC letter, dated Nov. 17, 2009, from an area resident. He was shocked to discover that not only were agencies doing testing for toxins on the site, but they failed to communicate the results with village officials.

"It's very alarming for a couple of reasons," Evans said. "Number one: testing has gone on that we knew should have been conducted but the results thus far were never shared with the village. Secondly, now it indicates that the problem with that site may be migrating off-site."

A DOH official confirmed Friday that both state agencies were investigating whether the soil vapor intrusion has occurred off-site.

The American Valve Company operated from 1920 to 1988 at the Coxsackie location until the company went out of business. The manufacturing plant made valves and pipe fittings, operating a foundry at the site which produced approximately 70,000 cubic yards of waste sand contaminated with lead. The industrial waste was dumped into a landfill at the southern end of the property.

When the company stopped operating the plant, the landfill was abandoned but was not properly contained.

Environmental investigators deemed the waste as hazardous because of the high lead content and it was determined to be migrating off-site from wind and storm water erosion of the foundry sands

A remedial investigation was completed to address the toxic foundry sands in early 1997, and a remedial design of the site was completed in June 1999. The groundwater and building contamination remediation study was completed in January 1999.

The building was demolished in 2001, contaminated soils have been treated, the landfill was capped and groundwater monitoring wells were installed.

Site management activities continue at the site, according to DEC spokeswoman Lori Severino.

Evans recalled that the remediation process took longer than expected due to contractors hired by the DEC going bankrupt.

Now, he said, these new findings may be connected to the site's disorderly remediation process.

"Obviously, there was an issue on how that remediation was done," he said.

The village had once considered acquiring the property and possibly creating a park or little league field there, thinking it was environmentally safe.

"This (new investigation) just goes to prove why you wouldn't want to do that," said Evans, regarding the village purchasing the site for recreational use.

It is unknown when air sampling will begin in the area, where there are approximately 20 homes. The site sits next to Spencer Boulevard, Cato Street, and Mansion Streets, with the Coxsackie-Athens high and middle schools lying close to the south.

To reach reporter Colin DeVries please call 518-943-2100 ext. 3325, or e-mail cdevries@thedailymail.net.

ADVISEN FPN
FRONT PAGE NEWS

Tuesday, January 18 2011

Environmental

State testing toxic plume in Copiague [Newsday, Melville, N.Y.]

Publication Date: 01/17/2011
Source: Newsday (Melville, NY)

State testing toxic plume in Copiague [Newsday, Melville, N.Y.]

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Source: Newsday (Melville, NY)

State testing toxic plume in Copiague [Newsday, Melville, N.Y.]

Jan. 17--State environmental officials are testing air quality at a cluster of homes near an abandoned Copiague industrial site where chemical pollution first found more than eight years ago has moved south through groundwater.

The contaminant plume beneath 13 neighborhood houses contains trichloroethane, or TCA, an industrial solvent and common ingredient in spot removers and paints. Such chemicals evaporate easily and can move up through the soil as vapor, sometimes seeping into buildings. High concentrations in indoor air or prolonged exposure may affect people's health.

It's an issue at dozens of Long Island buildings near hazardous-waste sites ranging from tiny dry cleaners to the former Grumman defense plant in Bethpage. The problem, often identified years after the original pollution is found, typically is addressed with special ventilation systems.

Whether the Copiague plume poses health risks to residents is not clear. The owners of five affected homes have responded to requests for access by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and results from those tests are pending.

State Health Department spokesman Jeffrey Hammond said the testing is "a precaution." The pollution does not threaten a nearby drinking water well to the northwest, officials said, and the neighborhood is on public water that is regularly tested for contaminants.

Still, news of the pollution has some residents on edge.

"I'd like the contaminated property to be dug up and taken care of," said Jim Brady, who lives three blocks from the derelict warehouse. "I want it cleaned up from the core, and I want it cleaned up from under everyone's house."

The process is not always that simple -- or fast.

"There's dozens of these happening in any given year," said John Swarthout, section chief for the DEC's division of environmental remediation. "Sometimes, later that year, somebody looks at it, sometimes it takes five years. It all depends on how serious it seems to be."

DEC officials said the pollution at the Copiague site is not as widespread or concentrated as solvent plumes associated with larger hazardous-waste sites.

"It's in one small neighborhood, where with Grumman it's a very large regional plume affecting several miles," Swarthout said.

Originally used for manufacturing, the building, at 1305 S. Strong Ave., later housed a wallpaper company and a car- and boat-repair business. It has been empty since 2003, the DEC said.

Suffolk health officials launched an investigation in 2001 after finding two drums of unknown substances, along with two fuel tanks and more than 50 5-gallon pails of inks and paints. The investigation was referred to DEC in 2004.

Two years later, the state turned the on-site portion of the investigation over to a realty company that bought the South Strong Avenue parcel. The owner applied to clean it up through the state brownfields program, which offers tax incentives for renovating contaminated sites.

But delays and missed deadlines led the state to suspend its agreement with Crescent Realty Group in August, "after little work was done," said DEC spokesman Bill Fonda. Newsday's efforts to reach the group's

chairman, Dominick Mavellia, were unsuccessful.

Some residents say it's taken too long to clean up a problem officials have known about for nearly a decade.

DEC officials said some delays stemmed from the owner's decision to clean up the property, which suspended the state investigation. Now, agency staff are putting together a plan to complete the on-site probe.

Last summer the state also began work to determine how far the pollution had traveled. Monitoring well samples indicate a plume of TCA some 400 feet wide has moved more than 700 feet south of the property.

The highest concentrations -- 83.6 parts per billion and 172 parts per billion -- were detected between 6 to 21 feet deep. The state drinking water standard is 5 parts per billion.

Officials said it's unlikely residents have ingested the chemicals because the neighborhood is on public water. Once results of the indoor vapor tests are available, state officials will decide whether to contact the three homeowners who declined to allow the testing, as well as the five who did not respond to letters and phone calls.

"My personal conclusion is that we're not going to find very much," said Jim Harrington, director of the DEC's regional remediation bureau.

Some residents remain concerned. Philip Sosnicki of Brookside Court wonders if the pollution has anything to do with the pancreatic cancer that killed his wife three years ago, or the lung cancer afflicting his father, who lives next door.

Such questions are tough to answer. Studies are inconclusive on whether TCA exposure increases risk for cancer, although lengthy exposure to high levels may increase the risk of harm to the heart, liver and nervous system. What's more, household products in homes are more often the source of such chemicals in indoor air than contaminated vapor, according to the state Health Department.

"If it's gotten into the homes, what happens to the homes?" said Sosnicki, 55. "Who's going to make up the difference in the property value?"

Printed from the Independent Weekly website: localhost

POSTED ON JANUARY 20, 2010:

The dirt on dry cleaning

Durham residents concerned about chemical contamination

By Samiha Khanna

Click for larger image • This site of a former dry cleaner on Club Boulevard later housed a church. Durham officials condemned the building due to chemical contamination.
Photo by Jeremy M. Lange

Eight hours a week for more than two years, parishioners of the Word of Faith church in Durham flocked to a makeshift sanctuary inside a rented building near downtown and gathered for fellowship, prayer and healing. What the churchgoers did not know at the time, state officials believe, is that while they celebrated and sang in praise, the air they breathed was contaminated with the vapors of a toxic dry cleaning solvent—a probable carcinogen—that had seeped into the ground for years.

Three decades before the church moved to 1103 W. Club Blvd. near Northgate Mall, the building housed a dry cleaning service, One Hour Martinizing, where workers labored over laundry using the chemical tetracholoroethylene, also known as perchloroethylene or perc, to expertly clean fine garments.

Whether via accidental spills, negligent or unknowing workers or lax regulations on disposal, the solvent soaked into the grounds around the business and contaminated the soil and groundwater.

Now the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources has found the chemical also has spread at least 150 feet to homes on adjacent Dollar Avenue in the Trinity Park neighborhood. Vapors from perc in the groundwater have infiltrated at least two houses, and residents are fretting over the potential effects of the contamination on their community, property values and long-term health. Although the state has a 10-year-old program to help test and clean up perc-contaminated properties, its funding is limited and doesn't include help for residents who suffer health problems or financial losses associated with the chemical contamination.

Research cited by the federal government has linked exposure to high levels of perc, a nonflammable, stain-removing liquid, to liver and kidney damage. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the chemical "may reasonably be anticipated to be a carcinogen," or cancer-causing material. Most city residents don't get their water from private wells and thus are unlikely to be at risk for drinking water contaminated with perc. For them, the risk is in the air inside their own homes.

Click for larger image • Laura Drey's home on Dollar Street is contaminated with the same chemical used at the dry cleaner that occupied a building around the corner. She is trying to move to another neighborhood.
Photo by Jeremy M. Lange

Laura Drey has lived in her Dollar Avenue home for 24 years, during which the contaminated building

across from her backyard has hosted a BB&T bank, two clothiers and finally, the Word of Faith church. Over the past six months, state researchers have visited her house multiple times to conduct nearly a dozen tests on the soil, groundwater and air inside her home. Twice, the indoor air levels exceeded safe limits, said Billy Meyer, a DENR project manager overseeing the contamination at 1103 W. Club Blvd. Last week, Drey submitted her blood to a lab to determine how much perc is stored in her body and made an offer on a house across the city, where she hopes to escape any additional exposure.

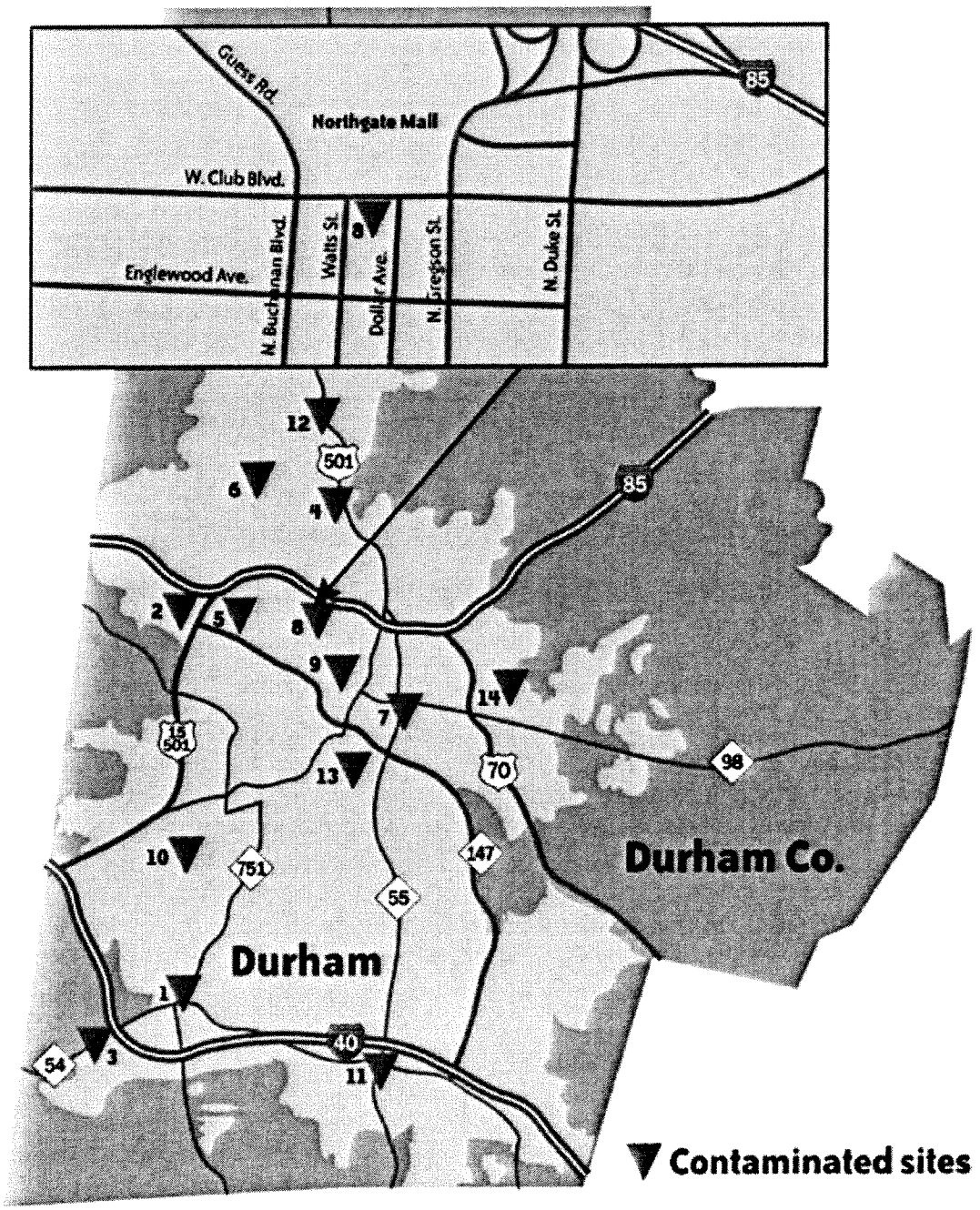
"I have trouble sleeping. It's consumed my time, my thoughts," Drey said. Although the chemical is odorless, Drey knows it surrounds her as she lives and works from a home office in her two-story brick cottage. "It's impacted my personal life." She wonders whether the chemical or the stress it has caused are to blame for her dry cough, recent bouts of dizziness or even the pronounced stutter that has affected her speech since last summer.

The churchgoers, Drey and other neighbors are just a few of potentially thousands of residents across the state whose health could be at risk through their exposure to perc. In Durham County alone, the state has documented 14 sites (see list and map below) where perc has penetrated the soil and groundwater. The level of contamination varies, although no sites rival the urgency of the West Club Boulevard site, where groundwater levels were once documented at 70,000 parts per billion—100,000 times the state limit for groundwater.

Stubborn stains

Property or business owners at the following sites have applied to the state's Dry Cleaning Solvent Cleanup Act program to determine the extent of contamination of perchloroethylene, or perc, a liquid dry cleaning solvent.

Most of the sites are unoccupied or former dry cleaning facilities that have closed. Some of the sites are now home to new businesses. Information on all the sites was not immediately available at press time. For more information, visit www.ncdsca.org



1. American Dry Cleaners, 4711 Hope Valley Rd.

2. Carolina Banner Signs Solar Film & T-Shirt Printing, 3535 Hillsborough Rd.
This building once housed Plants Unlimited, as well as a dry cleaning service. Perc contamination has spread to nearby Ellerbe Creek, but the extent of the contamination is below state surface water standards, according to state officials.

3. Carolina Cleaners, 2214 Nelson Hwy.
According to the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL), perc contamination is

limited to the building slab. A nearby church and playground were not affected.

4. Durham Animal Hospital, 4306 N. Roxboro St.

5. Durham Dry Cleaners, 2526-B Erwin Rd.

6. Hollywood Cleaners, 3823 Guess Rd.

7. Model Laundry, 1001 Holloway St.
This vacant site, at the corner of Calvin and Holloway streets, is across from the new Durham Police Department District 1 Substation and from Goose Creek. According to BREDL, contamination may have affected Goose Creek.

8. One Hour Martinizing, 1103 W. Club Blvd.
This building housed One Hour Martinizing from 1963 to 1975, and later, BB&T Bank, Tharrington's, a men's clothier; and Word of Faith church. Perc vapors inside this building were so high that in May 2009, the City of Durham condemned the building. Vapors have caused indoor air contamination in at least two homes on Dollar Avenue.

9. Scott & Roberts Dry Cleaners, 733 Foster St.
This business still operates but serves only as a drop-off and pickup service. It is directly across the street from the Central Park School for Children.

10. Shannon Dry Cleaning & Laundromat, 3710 Shannon Rd., Shannon Plaza Shopping Center

11. Triangle Square Cleaners, 4731 Apex Hwy., Triangle Square Shopping Center

12. Tyndall's Cleaners, 5314 N. Roxboro Rd.
This site is available for sale or lease, according to a sign outside the vacant building. According to BREDL, the plume of perc is 400 feet long.

13. Weaver's Cleaners, 1212 Fayetteville St.
A dry cleaning site from 1972 to 2002, it was also a grocery store, according to a state report. It is across the street from Stanford L. Warren Library and is for sale, according to a sign posted outside.

14. W.P. Ballard, 639 Junction Rd.
This is a former chemical storage facility where cleanup has begun, according to state officials.

Sources: N.C. Division of Waste Management, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

The Durham sites range from the now defunct Weaver's Cleaners on Fayetteville Street, which operated until 2002 and is now for sale, to the site of a former dry cleaner on North Roxboro Road, which now operates as an animal hospital. Beyond Durham, contractors are probing contamination levels at roughly 230 sites across the state that at one time have hosted dry-cleaning services. And those numbers will likely grow.

There could be as many as 1,500 current and former dry cleaners in North Carolina where perc is

leaching into the soil, groundwater and air inside people's homes and businesses, said Pete Doorn, a supervisor with the state who oversees cleanup efforts under the Dry Cleaning Solvent Cleanup Act (DSCA). However, that number could be higher, and the actual number is unknown, in part because the state's cleanup program is voluntary. The state doesn't look for sites that may be contaminated, Doorn said. Instead, business or property owners approach the state if they suspect their property is contaminated with perc.

If tests show that soil, groundwater, wells or other resources are contaminated with perc, the state starts planning a challenging and costly cleanup paid for by a fund established under the Dry Cleaning Solvent Cleanup Act. The state law, proposed to state lawmakers in the late 1990s by dry cleaners themselves, created a surcharge on perc and allotted a portion of state taxes on dry cleaning services to go to a cleanup fund. The fund brings in about $7.5 million a year, Doorn said. But with a current balance of $24 million, resources are thin when spread across the 230 contaminated sites. Additionally, regulations on the cleanup program allow the state to spend only $500,000 to $1 million per year on removing contaminants from a site. Based on national figures, an average cleanup costs $330,000.

With these stipulations, "we're not even going to get close to making sure these sites get cleaned up," said Sue Dayton, statewide coordinator of a program under the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League to ban perc use in dry cleaning services. In addition to concerns about funding, Dayton criticizes the fact that the state will clean contaminated groundwater only to minimum perc levels acceptable for groundwater—not to the level at which it would be safe to drink.

"We believe that the groundwater that has been contaminated should be cleaned, even though people aren't drinking the water," Dayton said. "At some point in the future, people may be drinking that water again. To continue to leave contamination in the environment is not acceptable."

Dayton has worked closely with Drey and her neighbors to keep them informed of the risks of perc contamination and their legal rights. Several attorneys and consultants recently appeared with Dayton at a meeting of the Trinity Park Neighborhood Association, including Mark Fogel, a renowned Triangle attorney who specializes in environmental law.

The law does not allow residents to hold One Hour Martinizing responsible for the perc contamination from more than 30 years ago, Fogel explained. But anyone who has owned the building in the past 10 years could be held accountable for damages, including the loss of property value, Fogel said.

"If you own property, even if you aren't responsible for the release [of the chemical], they can come after you," he said. Fogel is not representing any residents, he said, and no residents have taken any legal action against owners to recoup any losses.

Efforts to reach the building's out-of-state owner, Liduvina Garcia, were unsuccessful. It's unclear whether she disclosed to her church tenants that the building she leased to them was contaminated. Garcia purchased the building in 2007 from BB&T bank, which had already approached the state about contamination at the site.

In spring 2009, state tests showed that perc vapors inside the building posed an immediate risk to the health of the church congregation, and the City of Durham subsequently condemned the building, project manager Meyer said. Garcia has since been working with the state to plan a cleanup of the site, Doorn said. The building on her property has been appraised at $153,000, and the state's DSCA program will soon make an offer to Garcia to compensate her for the demolition of the structure, which will be necessary to address the contamination in the ground beneath it, Doorn said. If Garcia accepts the offer

and allows the state to clean up her property, she could be responsible for up to $20,000 of the cost, Doorn said.

Any plans to dig up the contamination at the site must first go through a lengthy process of public input and revision before any action is taken, Doorn said, so several months could pass before any action is taken.

Like at the One Hour Martinizing site, which operated from 1963 to 1975, nearly all the perc contamination state officials are seeing occurred before the mid-1980s, when regulations on the handling and disposal of the chemical became stricter, Doorn said. Before then, the chemical could have been leaked from spills, faulty machinery and the improper disposal of water and filters used in the dry-cleaning process, he said.

At the time people didn't know about certain risks with perc like they do now, said Sto Fox, executive director of the N.C. Association of Launderers and Cleaners, a trade association that represents 150 member businesses across the state. It is credited for some of the momentum behind the Dry Cleaning Solvent Cleanup Act and the law's collective cleanup fund.

"I had no clue until I got involved in these kinds of issues ... that perchloroethylene passes through poured concrete at the molecular level," said Fox, whose father launched his family's Greensboro dry cleaning business just after World War II. "We weren't sloppy, but we were dealing with it the way the [Environmental Protection Agency] told us to. My father was college educated. He wasn't some country bumpkin out there, but he had no idea that we were dealing with a solvent that had these potential implications down the path."

Now, Fox said, stricter regulations have improved practices. He doesn't feel the chemical poses any risks to human health, and he challenges conclusions from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that have indicated perc poses a cancer risk.

"For crying out loud," Fox said. "We wouldn't be doing what we're doing if we thought there was a significant risk involved, that we were shortening our lives."

But many environmentalists say the chemical is dangerous and that North Carolina should follow states such as California, where a law enacted three years ago prohibited the installation of new dry cleaning machines that use perc and will completely phase out the chemical by 2023.

"By and large, the dry cleaning industry's mantra is that it's OK now to use perc because there's stricter rules," Dayton said. "It's incorrect and not based on fact. And they're not looking at the entire cycle—the making and manufacturing, from cradle to grave and what effects it has on people along the way. It absolutely needs to be banned."

URL for this story: http://localhost/gyrobase/Content?oid=408860

EPA Finds Contamination in Donnelsville Aquifer

Written by Administrator

Friday, 14 January 2011 10:47

Representatives of the Ohio EPA, Ohio Department of Health and Clark County Combined Health District met with over 75 residents of Donnelsville and the surrounding area on Thursday evening to outline their findings and provide recommendations regarding the perchloroethylene (PCE) found in some local wells in 2010.
PCE is a colorless liquid widely used for dry cleaning of fabrics; hence it is sometimes called "dry-cleaning fluid." It has a sweet odor detectable by most people at a concentration of 1 part per million (1 ppm)

Historically wells have been sampled in the area. In October 1995, Ohio EPA sampled the well water at the former site of Donnelsville Elementary and five private wells to the east. All of the samples showed the presence of PCE contamination, but none were higher than the U. S. EPA safe drinking water levels.

In April of 1997 Ohio EPA gathered 13 samples of surface soil at Econ-O-Machine Products; however no volatile compounds were detected in these samples. In December 2004 samples were taken as required by law of the new Donnelsville Elementary well. No PCE was found in this new well.
From July 29 – Aug. 2, 2010 the Ohio EPA sent letters and went door to door to gain permission to sample private wells in Donnelsville with 36 land owners giving permission for testing. Samples were collected Sept. 13-15. Private well owners were notified in early December of those findings.

To date, nine wells exceed the recommend levels with 7 being above the U. S. EPA's lifetime (70 years) cancer risk guidelines. According to Anthony Campbell of The Ohio EPA Division of Emergency and Remedial Response office these wells are located along North Hampton Road. He noted that the EPA would be taking additional samples along Hampton Road this week near the wells that showed the highest level of contamination. The intention is to find the source with assistance form the U. S. EPA. "Permission to sample has been great. It gives us the information to help you" stated Campbell.

Dr. Robert Frey, Geologist and Prinicple Investigator for the Health Assessment Section of the Ohio Department of Health Bureau of Environment al Health attended the meeting. He stated that the source of the contamination is unknown, but appears to be north of Rt 40 based on the information gathered from wells on North Hampton Road. It was noted during the meeting that wells along Rt 40 along with some on both North and South Hampton Road show PCE contamination in lower levels.

Frey noted that the next steps are to identify the source by working with private well owners. He explained that the agencies would be working with homeowners to facilitate the installation of whole-house water treatment systems to reduce or eliminate PCE exposure in the homes with impacted wells.

It should be noted that the team will only be testing wells with owner permission. Residents who have not been selected for testing can elect to test their wells for PCE and other related chemicals at a cost of $85. Tests can be scheduled by calling the Clark County Combined Health District at 937-390-5600. It

was also stated at the meeting that the public funds are being used to test wells most critical to finding the source.
Residents, who would like further information on this investigation or PCE contamination, can contact Erika Wiggins at Ohio EPA to be placed on the mailing list.

By e-mail at erika.wiggins@epa.ohio.gov or calling 614-644-2160. For questions on whole-house water treatment systems or other concerns, contact Dan Chatfield, Clark County Combined Health District at 937-390-5600, ext. 239 or e-mail DChatfield@ccchd.com .

Comments (0)
Last Updated on Friday, 14 January 2011 11:05

Reporting 1 Blog

From the hot computers and sharp minds of budding journos at the U of Oregon

Trainsong's Contaminated Trust

Posted on July 2, 2010 by Deborah Bloom

by Deborah Bloom

EUGENE, Ore. — Despite a slew of recent news reports claiming that soil contamination in the neighborhood of Trainsong is no longer a hazard, residents remain skeptical.

A plume of toxic chemicals from Eugene's Rail Yard has been seeping into Trainsong's groundwater for decades, compromising air and water safety. These substances reportedly increase the risk for cancer and cause harm to the immune system, central nervous system, kidneys, and liver.

In 2005, Union Pacific Railroad began to clean up the soil contamination. The following year, the company started to study levels of contamination with oversight from the Department of Environmental Quality. After the railroad's study on vapor intrusion — a term used to describe toxins that rise from the ground into the air — was concluded, levels were found to have dramatically decreased. Now, they claim the problem is mitigated and will be monitored biannually.

However, some in Trainsong say this is not enough. Chris Daugenti, a resident of seven years, is unconvinced by the recent study's findings. These plumes can move in the ground, he said, causing some areas to be more concentrated than others at different times. "How much of it is actually getting lower, or is it just moving around?"

Describing the railroad's response as "proactive," DEQ employee Don Hanson is confident with decontamination efforts. "Concentrations are low," he said. And although Trainsong residents should steer clear of the groundwater, "conditions are good."

Yet, Nicole Sharette, head of the Trainsong Neighborhood Association, explained some residents' skepticism regarding the railroad's decontamination efforts.

"I know a lot of neighbors who don't feel that it's fine or that the investigation was thorough enough," she said. "The house across the street [from me] was contaminated, but they never even checked my house. At one point, they just quit checking and said everything was fine after that."

However, Hanson believes that the railroad's actions were thorough. Union Pacific performed a comprehensive cleanup of the source area, he said. And the outreach in Trainsong concerning this issue has been immense. "There's been a huge amount of public involvement."

But not enough to quell the skeptics. Daugenti believes that more can be done by the railroad, "but it would be more money that they don't want to spend," he said. "They are probably doing what they are expected to by the DEQ and that's probably it."

According to Sharette, contamination is still a problem, and one that is not easily solved without more social capital. "We have been underrepresented as a neighborhood for years," she said. "And the powers-that-be have taken advantage of this situation because there is no one to defend this neighborhood."

Regardless of the study's efficacy, both the State of Oregon and Union Pacific make one very clear point: it will be a long time until Trainsong residents will ever enjoy safe access to their own ground-water.

This entry was posted in environmental issues, neighborhoods and tagged journalism, neighborhood blog, Trainsong, pollution, Deborah Bloom, Union Pacific Railroad. Bookmark the permalink.

KVAL 13 - Eugene, Oregon

Print this article

'Contamination in the groundwater ... doesn't just go away overnight'

by David Walker KVAL News and KVAL.com staff

Originally printed at http://www.kval.com/news/local/82315012.html

EUGENE, Ore. -- People living in the Trainsong neighborhood of Eugene have been waiting to find out if their homes are being affected by vapors from contaminated groundwater from the Union Pacific railyard.

The state started looking into the potential for contamination back in 2006. On Thursday, they issued the results of a year-long study of homes located near the rail yard.

The study shows the air quality inside homes in the Trainsong neighborhood is not affected by vapors released through contaminated groundwater.

"You know they couldn't come up with enough evidence to show that there were direct connections between ground water contamination and chemical contaminations in the indoor environment for the houses that were the closest to the flume," said Tom Musselwhite, president of the Trainsong neighborhood group.

Investigators have been taking a very close look at nine homes in the trainsong area. They've been measuring and comparing vapor levels in the soil and the crawlspaces of those homes, as well as monitoring the air inside and outside those homes.

In seven of those homes, the levels were below the levels of health concern.

In the other two, investigators concluded the air is not affected by contaminated groundwater but by chemicals within the homes themselves.

The state will work with those two homeowners to identify and remove the sources of contamination.

Zach Tennant and his family live in Trainsong and are glad to get the test results.

"Well it makes me feel so good because my family's right in the area," he said. "I have two really good friends with four kids, one with three kids, and you know it's just like their family is going to be great now."

Musselwhite said there are still more questions to be answered about groundwater contamination.

"It will continue to be an issue for years to come," he said. "Once you get contamination in the groundwater that's persistent and stays there seasonally year after year after year, it doesn't just go away overnight."

The railroad will continue monitoring soil gas levels to determine how long the vapor barriers will need to be maintained.

Read the study

I.Agency: Treat Valmont groundwater

BY KENT JACKSON (STAFF WRITER)
Published: August 25, 2010

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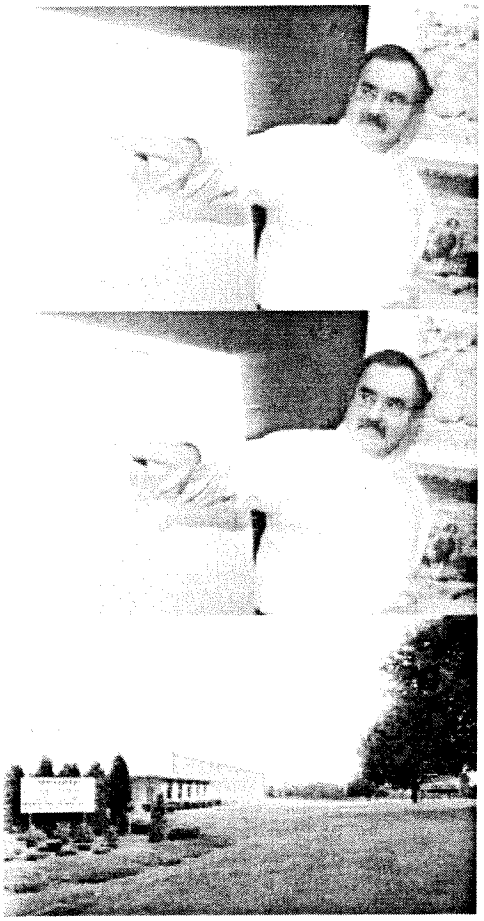


STANDARD-SPEAKER FILE PHOTO The former Chromatex plant, seen here in 2001, used a carcinogen called TCE. A broken pipe caused soil and groundwater in the area to be contaminated.

A federal agency recommends treating contaminated water below ground at the Valmont Industrial Park rather than pumping it to the surface and then removing a carcinogen.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said underground treatment will save money and time in the cleanup of the cancer-causing chemical trichloroethylene or TCE. A study done during the past two years at the site shows that below-ground treatment can reduce levels of TCE.

Tests found TCE leaking into soil and groundwater from the former Chromatex No. 2 plant at Valmont in West Hazleton 23 years ago. Chromatex used TCE to attach stain repellent to upholstery and rugs. The

company stored TCE in two tanks in the plant and caught spills in an underground tank, where a broken pipe was discovered.

Since the discovery, authorities installed water lines so people living near the plant wouldn't drink or bathe from contaminated wells. Contractors excavated 18,000 tons of contaminated soil and installed systems to vent 17 homes containing fumes of TCE. In 2001, the agency placed the site on its Superfund list, a register of polluted areas given national priority for cleanup.

Now the agency proposed a plan to treat the contaminated groundwater.

The public has until Sept. 30 to submit written comments about the plan and also may attend a meeting at which agency officials will explain the plan on Sept. 16 at 7 p.m. at the West Hazleton Borough Community Complex Building, 100 S. Fourth St.

Paul Kattner, who lives near the plant, said five homes that sold on his block since the discovery of the TCE leak indicate turnover in the neighborhood. He wonders what impact TCE will have on people who spent part of their childhood in Valmont.

"The effects may be seen in future generations," Kattner said.

Cleaning up TCE already has taken nearly a generation, as a young woman working for an environmental agency predicted during a casual conversation with Kattner years ago.

"She basically said, 'You won't see it in your lifetime, sir,'" Kattner recalled.

The plan for the cleanup said children and adults face significant, potential risks from direct exposure with contaminated groundwater. Last summer, the agency reminded residents not to use well water for any purpose, including washing cars, gardening or filling swimming pools.

To clean the groundwater, the agency wants to inject potassium permanganate underground. When potassium permanganate enters water, it breaks down TCE into benign compounds - carbon dioxide, manganese dioxide, chlorine and weak hydrochloric acid, the plan says.

Contractors will force a slurry of potassium permanganate underground at 200 to 300 pounds per square inch of pressure, about one-fifth the force of a power washer. As the potassium permanganate squeezes into rock fractures, it will widen the openings so more material will flow. Potassium permanganate will linger up to six months, increasing the opportunities to make contact with TCE.

Bhupi Khona, the agency's project manager at the site, said potassium permanganate reacts readily with TCE in groundwater but takes longer to react with TCE lodged between rock fissures.

"In the rock matrix, TCE takes time to come out. It took time to come into the rock," Khona said.

About 3.4 million gallons of water are tainted by TCE in a plume 500 feet by 2,000 feet.

The remedy will cost $728,000 for capital expenses and $14,300 to $49,000 a year for the five years required to process.

Pumping the groundwater to the surface, however, and treating it with more conventional methods such as air stripping before releasing it to the sewage treatment plant in Valmont would cost more and take longer, according to the plan.

"You're pumping buckets of water to get a small microgram or less of contaminants," Khona said.

The initial, capital charge of $888,000 for pumping and treating groundwater would rise by annual costs of $12,700 to $155,300 for 20 years.

Pumping and treating would cause more short-term disruption while pipelines are installed than would injecting potassium permanganate into the ground.

To inject potassium permanganate, contractors would pump through nine wells, three of which need to be dug.

Contractors would pump 5,000 gallons of slurry containing 4 percent potassium permanganate into each well and repeat the injections four times during the next five years.

A pilot study conducted between 2008 and 2010 shows potassium permanganate can reduce TCE to levels acceptable in drinking water and linger on the rocks for up to six months, the plan said.

In the study, 26,000 pounds of potassium permanganate was pumped through six wells to depths between 18 feet and 92 feet. TCE is in groundwater as deep as 150 feet, but Khona said the potassium permanganate will reach it.

"We inject in a zone that is supposed to be more permeable. Eventually it goes down," he said.

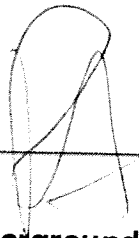
The study found reductions of three or four times the original levels of TCE after contact with potassium permanganate, he said.

TCE levels are as high as 2,200 parts per billion near the plant and 100 ppb in the neighborhood near the plant.

The goal is to bring those levels to 5 ppb, the agency's maximum containment level for TCE in drinking water, which Khona thinks is achievable.

Reducing the levels to near 100 ppb is relatively easy with potassium permanganate, he said. Bacteria that break down the chemicals in TCE can help achieve still lower concentrations.

He also wants to reduce vinyl chloride, another pollutant found in one section of the plant area, to 2 ppb and said the agency will continue monitoring chromium, which was found in three wells at more than the maximum containment level of 100 micrograms per liter.



Close

What lies beneath: Leaking underground tanks leave legacy of contamination

By Christopher Baxter, The Morning Call, Allentown, Pa.

Feb. 28--Honora Gilmore had looked forward to hosting Christmas dinner at her Upper Nazareth Township home last year, but a pungent diesel odor blanketing the neighborhood doused her holiday plans.

The smell began in November as a passing perfume in the breeze, Gilmore said. But it intensified and spread. By December, the stench was so pronounced motorists on Township Line Road often dialed 911.

"Most people were thinking it was a gas leak, but I was more concerned because I live there, I don't just drive by," Gilmore said. "I was scared that I was living with some silent killer."

The culprit was a leaky underground storage system at a nearby truck terminal. It is one of thousands of tank systems across Pennsylvania that have failed and contaminated soil and water, and exposed neighborhoods to dangerous chemicals.

A Morning Call investigation -- which included dozens of interviews, visits to six sites and reviews of state files on several of the 143 ongoing cleanups in the Lehigh Valley -- found spills left lingering for years or even decades, homeowners kept in the dark about nearby problems and inconsistent tracking and enforcement by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

But perhaps more fearsome is what is not known: the condition of abandoned or forgotten tanks decaying underground near streams and homes. The U.S. Government Accountability Office in 2005 estimated Pennsylvania had 2,334 incomplete cleanups at sites without a viable owner.

Leaks can be catastrophic, as in Whitpain Township, Montgomery County, where a 13,000-gallon leak in 1998 from a gas station's underground tank polluted groundwater and forced residents from their homes. The station's owner went bankrupt, according to DEP, forcing the state to tap an insurance fund financed in part by taxes consumers pay at the pump, to cover about $13 million in cleanup costs.

Despite improved state and federal regulations, the legacy of leaky tanks and the risk of spills remain. Tank owners in Pennsylvania reported 201 new spills in 2009, and the state has a backlog of more than 3,000 incomplete cleanups, according to DEP.

Officials at some of the backlogged sites that are marked as incomplete, such as Lehigh Valley International Airport, say work is complete but DEP is behind on its records. At other locations, such as the Sunoco Park Mart in South Whitehall Township, state records show contamination in an aquifer has persisted for 20 years.

Pollution knows no bounds

Fuel-polluted water can pose health and environmental risks. The benzene in a 10-gallon gasoline spill can pollute 12 million gallons of water -- the equivalent of about 24 Olympic-size pools -- according to a community environmental Web site run by the University of Colorado in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Benzene, a fuel component, can cause serious health problems, including cancer or death, if ingested at moderately unsafe levels over a lifetime.

Some leaks are so bad DEP brings in health officials. That was the case in Hazleton, when the state Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studied blood samples and air quality in hundreds of homes for years after a huge leak was detected in 1993.

Once a spill is reported to DEP, tank owners must hire consultants and begin a process that extends beyond simply removing a tank and soil; it requires an understanding of rock formations and chemical properties and involves calculated guesswork.

Cleaning up a spill often takes five or more years, said Dave Everitt, president of Bangor-based MEA Inc., an environmental services firm. EPA estimates the average cleanup costs $125,000.

Making things worse, pollution knows no political boundaries, as Gilmore and her neighbors learned. DEP traced the odor in their neighborhood to Central Transport, an East Allen Township trucking firm, according to a Dec. 18 notice from the state to the company. Storm water mixed with

diesel appeared to have washed off the site and contaminated a runoff channel, said DEP regional spokesman Mark Carmon.

The fuel entered the township's storm-water system, crossed into Upper Nazareth, passed the homes of Gilmore and Cheryle Perry and headed north across Newburg Road, DEP records show. Pollution was visible for about 100 yards along nearby railroad tracks, the notice states. Preliminary soil samples found petroleum, DEP said.

State inspectors on Dec. 23 traced the leak to Central's diesel dispenser, part of its underground storage tank system, Carmon said. Central did not stop using the dispenser, causing more contamination, until ordered by the state on Jan. 5, Carmon said.

The dispenser has since been fixed, he said. Central must study the extent of contamination and submit a plan for cleanup by June 30. Phil Frame, spokesman for Michigan-based Central Transport, declined to comment until testing is complete.

Meanwhile, the odor still wafts from the storm-water grates along Township Line Road. Gilmore and Perry stopped drinking their well water weeks ago out of fear. "I took water for granted every day, and then this happens," said Perry, who has lived in the neighborhood for 22 years.

Preliminary results from well-water samples taken on their properties by DEP came back negative for contamination, Gilmore said. But she and Perry say it took local officials too long to respond to their concerns.

For example, DEP copied East Allen on the notices sent to the company, including photos and details of the contamination. But East Allen never shared that information with neighboring Upper Nazareth, where Gilmore and Perry live.

"We didn't contact anybody," Deborah Seiple, East Allen's manager, said in a recent interview. "As far as I'm concerned and the zoning office is concerned, until DEP gives a final determination as to what's going on there, it's in their hands."

When the EPA approved Pennsylvania's underground storage tank program in 2003, it required the state to notify municipalities of spills. EPA assumed municipalities would then tell the public.

East Allen shared the documents with Perry and Gilmore only after they asked about the odor, Perry said. Upper Nazareth Supervisor Chairman Joe Emrick said he learned of the problem after Perry and Gilmore brought it to his attention.

Congress steps in

Preventing spills has improved since 1984, when Congress directed the EPA to improve tank monitoring. Over the next 20 years, EPA found many of the country's 2.1 million tanks had rusted and ruptured, according to a 2004 report. About 1.7 million tanks have since been cleaned up.

In 1988, EPA raised tank standards and gave owners 10 years to upgrade, remove or replace their old systems. While compliance in Pennsylvania has steadily increased between 2006 and 2009, nearly 25 percent of tank owners don't meet requirements, DEP records show.

State and federal regulations apply only to non-residential tank systems storing petroleum products -- such as diesel, gasoline and kerosene -- as well as other hazardous substances defined by EPA.

Even the smallest deviation from regulations can result in lingering pollution, such as the decade-old cleanup at Kenneth Schuck Trucking Inc. on Blue Barn Road in Upper Macungie Township.

DEP in 1998 required Schuck to register and inspect his two 4,000-gallon underground diesel tanks, according to a state order filed against the company. Instead, Schuck illegally dug up the tanks without DEP oversight and failed to test for pollution, the order says.

In October 2009, a consultant assessing the site as part of a pending property sale found contaminated soil 22 feet deep.

Records show two other forgotten tanks, estimated to be 1,000 gallons each, also are below the site. No contamination was found around them, and tests so far have shown no polluted water. A complete study and a cleanup plan is due to DEP May 12.

Thomas Epting, whose family's home abuts the Schuck property, said the preliminary results provide little relief.

"It may not be in the groundwater yet, but it probably will be," worries Epting, who didn't know about the polluted soil.

Schuck died in August and left Rita Tatasciore of South Whitehall in charge of the site. Blue Barn Realty LLC purchased the property in December for $1.2 million, Lehigh County property records show.

Tatasciore, who helped run the business for 35 years, said in an interview that Schuck did not know when he pulled out the tanks that he needed oversight or had to test the soil. She did not know why he did not test after DEP filed the order but said she is now responsible for the cleanup.

"I think it was something put on the back burner and he just never got to it," Tatasciore said. "But the state never came back to us for anything."

In another long-running case, groundwater contamination beneath the Sunoco Park Mart on Route 309 in South Whitehall has persisted since it was first documented by the state 20 years ago.

Tests in 1989, 1990 and 1993 confirmed gas contamination in the groundwater, according to DEP. But the agency says it has no record of the pollution being cleaned up. Pipeline Petroleum Co., Park Mart's owner since 1980, removed five tanks in 1991, according to the state.

In February 2008, an environmental consultant hired by Pipeline installed monitoring wells at Park Mart and found hazardous levels of benzene and MTBE, a gas additive, in the groundwater, according to a January report filed with the state. But the company did not report the finding to DEP within 24 hours as required by law.

Bruce Ebert, president of Pipeline, said in an interview his company was "partially at fault" for not addressing the pollution. He said there is a question about where the contamination came from, even though his consultant faulted the site's old tanks.

"I'm sure we're doing whatever has to be done," Ebert said. "We always do."

Pipeline has been cited by the state more than a dozen times for violating storage tank regulations at Park Mart, records show. In January, the company was fined $4,500 for not reporting the most recent finding of groundwater pollution and for doing pipe work without DEP oversight.

An unused well north of the site, which is the direction in which groundwater flows there, has shown no contamination, according to the consultant's report. Linda Strisovsky, whose backyard abuts Park Mart to the south, said she knew nothing of the pollution. She has lived there since 1987, and used well water for a few years until her home was connected to a water main.

"We've gotten cards in the mail about zoning hearings for this building," she said. "If they were willing to give us a heads-up about zoning hearings, why wouldn't they let us know about possible contamination of the water?"

Gerald Gasda, South Whitehall manager, said the pollution is a state issue.

"Frankly, I'm not aware of any requirement that we notify anybody," Gasda said. He added he would be willing to create a policy to notify adjacent property owners of tank pollution if residents asked.

A cleanup at the Park Mart is pending.

Residents need to be vigilant

Underground tank issues get more complicated when owners abandon sites, rather than close them as required. That was the case on Route 191 in Bethlehem Township, where an apparently abandoned Exxon station sits near the Monocacy Creek.

Closed since about 2002, the former gas station, whose permits were revoked, has three tanks with a total capacity of 24,000 gallons. DEP last inspected the site in 2007, but could access only two tanks, Carmon said. Those two were empty; the state

knows little about the third.

The property is owned by Arminder Singh, who lists a business mailing address in Bethlehem, according to Northampton County records. Singh could not be reached for comment. Since DEP cannot reach Singh either, and there have been no obvious signs of leaks, the state cannot take action at the site, Carmon said.

If owners of orphaned tanks can be found, penalties for their neglect can be stiff. A federal judge in Scranton in December assessed $1.3 million in fines and interest against Century Oil Acquisition Co., of Spring Valley, N.Y., which walked away from underground tanks in the Poconos.

When property owners cooperate, studies can be extensive. They require drilling wells, taking soil samples and doing lab analysis. Cleanups become more complicated when underground pollution drifts toward property boundaries.

Such was the case at another Bethlehem Township site, where 3,366 gallons of kerosene leaked in August 2008 from a cracked tank at a Hess gas station on Easton Avenue, a few feet from Nancy Run creek.

A work crew recovered about 2,700 gallons, but samples from Oct. 7, 2009, showed kerosene components, including benzene, in the outermost testing wells. A consultant recommends drilling more monitoring wells, including on a neighboring property.

Hess corporate spokeswoman Lorrie Hecker would only say the company is implementing the plan DEP approved.

Cleaning up a site may be expensive, but there is help. Tank owners in Pennsylvania contribute 8 cents a gallon to a state fund, which acts as an insurance plan should a tank fail. Consumers kick in another 1.1 cents a gallon at the pumps. When an owner has a valid claim, the fund pays up to $1.5 million and can save a business.

Kim Cesare, owner of a former gas station in Pen Argyl, lined his tanks with fiberglass in the 1990s, but the lining failed and fuel inched toward nearby Weona Park. Working with MEA, the Bangor environmental firm, Cesare is able to restore the groundwater with the help of hundreds of thousands of dollars in cleanup funds.

"Without that," Cesare said, "it would have bankrupted me."

Many more sites across Pennsylvania will take years of work, however. At the rate it's going, the state may not close every backlogged case until 2025. And while spill containment has improved, new leaks are discovered near homes every year, though they slip under the public's radar.

DEP has no plan to revise its notification procedures, meaning it will continue to tell only municipalities and property owners directly affected by leaks. Unless municipalities share that information, residents will have to rely on their own vigilance.

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News

EPA to study vapor intrusion in Haverford

Friday, February 11, 2011

By LOIS PUGLIONESI
Times Correspondent

HAVERFORD — Concerned about the presence of trichloroethylene in groundwater at the Havertown Superfund site, Environmental Protection Agency officials are preparing to conduct a vapor intrusion study later this month.

The test will involve sampling TCE levels in a small number of homes and installing additional groundwater wells in the area.

While EPA officials would not release addresses, the area in question includes residences on Rittenhouse Circle and West Eagle Road.

TCE is a nonflammable, colorless liquid used as a solvent for cleaning or degreasing metal parts. It can enter groundwater when chemicals are spilled on the ground, poured down drains or otherwise improperly disposed of. TCE vapors have the potential to volatilize or off-gas through soil, and contaminate indoor air by seeping through cracks in basements and foundations.

According to information from EPA, health effects of TCE depend on the pathway, amount and time frame, with long-term exposure posing potential risk of nerve, kidney or liver damage. Some studies have shown that TCE causes cancer in these organs.

At present, the source of TCE contamination is unclear, EPA spokesman Roy Seneca said. Although EPA has known about the TCE for a number of years, efforts have been focused on original contaminants from the former National Wood Preservers site, which dumped liquid waste tainted with PCPs down a well during its years of operation, 1947-1991. Also found in soil and groundwater were arsenic, dioxins, volatile organic compounds and petroleum hydrocarbons.

However, EPA "now looks more closely than ever at vapor intrusion as a potential pathway," said Seneca. "Vapor intrusion was never considered so much in the past to be a problem. If there was TCE in groundwater, but a public water system was in place, it wasn't looked upon as a potential health concern. But vapor intrusion is something they look upon now as a ... concern."

Seneca said EPA won't know the true magnitude of the problem until test results are in. However, TCE levels measured to date have not been "exorbitantly high. The testing is a precautionary measure."

After obtaining consent from homeowners, EPA will take soil vapor samples from beneath building foundations by installing a "sampling port" about the size of a quarter. Samples will also be taken from the lowest point in the house, and possibly the next floor up, over a 24-hour period.

Laboratory analyses can take up to six weeks. If TCE levels are high, EPA might take more samples or install and pay for

vapor mitigation systems in homes. Similar to systems used for reducing radon, the equipment removes vapors from below basements or foundations and vents them outdoors. Additionally, the study may be expanded to include more residences in the area.

About 26,000 people live within a mile of the superfund site. There are no known users of groundwater within a mile radius.

A pump-and-treat system currently in place for groundwater remediation is addressing the TCE, Seneca said.

Seneca added that EPA officials do not believe the vapor intrusion issue will have any effect on the nearby bubble gum factory property, which the YMCA of Philadelphia plans to lease from the township for construction and operation of a new facility in 2012.

Michael Troupe, vice president of facilities for the YMCA, said, to date, the YMCA has done soil testing in and outside the building, and tests have come back favorably. "We're having conversations with different consultants regarding vapor intrusion. ... We will be including vapor intrusion (and) taking preventive measures to ensure that if anything should arise later, we have taken a proactive approach," Troupe said.

Environmental scientist Mike Levin, who has voiced concerns about EPA's handling of the matter for years, said, "We raised the point about vapor intrusion studies years ago, but got absolutely no answer. This EPA job just continues to stumble along the incompetence route. Truly, the latest development is an unfolding horror story."

EPA started work on the third and final phase of cleanup in November 2009. According to the website, a fourth five-year review completed in September 2009 found that "the site is protective in the short-term because the groundwater extraction and treatment facility is operating as intended, the multilayer geotextile cap prevents contact with contaminated soil."

EPA has also removed contaminated soil from an off-site recreation and open space area behind Rittenhouse Circle, a problem created by seepage from an abandoned sewer line since removed.

State Rep. Greg Vitali, D-166, of Haverford, said he plans to keep an eye on developments and attend the public meeting.

* * *

The public meeting with the EPA on the vapor intrusion study will be held 7-9 p.m. Feb. 16., in the commissioners meeting room.
