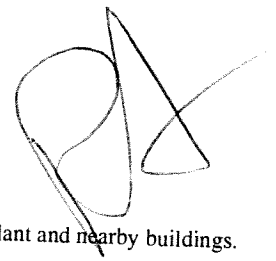
Vapor testing to begin April 12

By: CHRISTINA KRISTOFIC Bucks County Courier Times

Doylestown



The EPA will test for intrusion of chemical vapors into the site of the former Chem-Fab plant and nearby buildings.

The Environmental Protection Agency will soon begin testing about 30 properties near the former Chem-Fab plant on Broad Street in Doylestown for "vapor intrusion" - that is, the possible leaching of chemical vapors through the soil and into the air inside the buildings.

The properties are on the south side of Broad Street, between Doyle Street and the 611 bypass. All but one of the properties - Doyle Elementary School - are private residences.

Vapor intrusion can occur anywhere volatile organic chemicals have been found in the soil or groundwater.

Trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE) are classified as volatile organic chemicals, and have been found at the Chem-Fab site. Hexavalent chromium, a carcinogen that is dangerous if inhaled or ingested, has also been found at the site; EPA officials said they are not concerned about the chromium becoming a vapor.

Cindy Santiago, the on-scene coordinator for the EPA, said the EPA is testing the 30 properties to determine whether there is enough vapor intrusion to pose a threat to the health of the people who live and work at those properties.

"Usually, the likelihood is it's not going to be something you have to be alarmed about," she said.

EPA spokesman David Polish said last week that vapor intrusion testing is a precaution the EPA is taking at all contaminated sites where the federal agency is overseeing cleanup.

Federal and state environmental agencies began investigating the Chem-Fab site for contamination about a decade ago.

Chem-Fab was an electroplating and metal etching operation from 1965 to 1994.

Shortly after it closed, drug dealers began using the property as a meth lab. The EPA and the FBI closed the lab in 1995 and removed more than 100 drums of hazardous substances and more than 8,000 gallons of chromic acid waste that had been left on the site.

The EPA referred the site to the state Department of Environmental Protection in 1999 and the DEP discovered contaminants in the groundwater and soil.

Contaminated wells, including a municipal well, were closed in 2004 so no one could drink or bathe in the water. Nearby residences and businesses were connected to Doylestown's public water system.

The DEP tested the groundwater, soil and air again in 2009 before it turned the site over to the EPA. A DEP spokeswoman said at the time that the only building where the air was found to be contaminated was at 330 N. Broad St., but officials from the state Department of Health and OSHA determined that the level of contamination was not significant enough to require remedial action.

The EPA chose the area for vapor intrusion testing based on the movement of the groundwater plume, which they have determined from various tests of the groundwater.

The EPA will begin vapor intrusion testing the week of April 12. The agency or its contractors will collect samples of underground vapors from the 30 properties and send them to a federally certified lab for analysis. It will take about two months to get results. The EPA will share the results with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, which will help the EPA determine if any of the properties have dangerous levels of chemical vapors.

The EPA will install vapor extraction systems, which are similar to radon systems, in any homes that are found to have dangerous levels of chemical vapors. The systems and installation will be free for property owners.

March 26, 2010

WBIR.COM KNOXVILLE

Western Tenn. site proposed for Superfund program

5:53 PM, Mar 9, 2011 | comments

Written by
Gannett

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News Headlines

Bill Theobald, Gannett Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON - State and federal environmental officials have tried for more than two decades to figure out what contaminated municipal wells in the middle of Alamo in western Tennessee.

Lots of possible suspects were considered - a circuit-board maker, a local newspaper, a dry cleaner - but no definitive culprit could be identified, meaning no one could be required to pay for the cleanup.

This week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, at the request of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, proposed placing the wells on its National Priorities - or Superfund - List, so federal funds could be spent to remove the volatile organic compounds.

The proposal will be discussed at a public meeting that EPA officials in Atlanta have scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 15, at the Gibson Electric Corp. offices at 402 Egghill Road.

John Nolen, project manager for EPA at the Alamo site, said a final determination on whether to add the Alamo site to the Superfund list will occur after a 60-day public comment period.
That would be followed by an assessment of the site and development of a cleanup plan.

Federal officials say Alamo's drinking water has been treated to remove the contaminants and is safe.

But groundwater samples collected in 1988 and 1989 found dangerous levels of trichloroethene (TCE), a solvent used to remove grease from metal parts. Breathing small amounts of TCE can cause headaches, lung irritation, dizziness, poor coordination, and difficulty concentrating, according to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry. Breathing large amounts can be fatal. The substance is also thought to cause cancer.

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One city well was taken out of use immediately until a system to remove the dangerous compounds was installed in 1991.
Additional tests were done throughout the 1990s, in 2004 and last May. In addition to TCE, the tests found dangerous levels of tetrachloroethene (used in dry cleaning) and other solvents. The health dangers of tetrachloroethene (PCE), are similar to TCE.
But the tests didn't pinpoint the size of the plume of contaminated water or all the potential sources, said Meg Lockhart, spokeswoman for the state Department of Environment and Conservation.

Regulators first focused on Volunteer Circuits, which made circuit boards for the electronics industry from 1973-1975.
They also studied North Johnson Street Dry Cleaners, which closed in the early 1970s.

In the end, the EPA concluded that the "contamination cannot be directly attributed to any specific source, or combination of specific sources."

Bloomberg.com

Exxon's Oozing Texas Oil Pits Haunt Residents as XTO Deal Nears

By Joe Carroll

April 16 (Bloomberg) -- Bo Vavrusa was heaping dirt into the path of a wildfire on a Texas ranch in October 2007 when his tractor rammed an **Exxon Mobil Corp.** natural-gas pipe hidden in a thicket. Flames engulfed the tractor, burning his face, arms and hands as he fled.

"I thought I was fixing to die," said Vavrusa, 28, who was earning $10 an hour to groom the ranch for quail and dove **hunters**.

Exxon, the **biggest** U.S. oil producer, has neglected this stretch of Texas since its oil fields began drying up in the 1970s, said Jerry Patterson, the state's General Land Office Commissioner. Now Patterson and other state officials are urging Texas lawmakers to follow the examples of California and Pennsylvania in cracking down on oilfield practices that have left leaking pipelines, wells and storage tanks.

Oozing chemical pits and Vavrusa's scarred skin are emblematic of a **legacy** Exxon has sought to keep buried in court, even as it gears up for a return to active exploration within miles of the ranch through its pending **$29.3 billion acquisition** of Fort Worth, Texas-based XTO Energy Inc.

Exxon's renewed focus on North America follows nationalist energy policies in Venezuela and Russia that reduced opportunities to profit abroad. It coincides with fresh scrutiny in the U.S. that is leading Congress to examine whether stricter drilling regulations are needed.

Oil's 'Ugly Side'

"This isn't something the states are proud to advertise," said Philip Dellinger, chief of the groundwater section in the Austin, Texas, office of the Environmental Protection Agency. "It's the ugly side of the oil and gas business."

The EPA says it has no authority to force companies to address contamination on active fields and must defer to Texas regulators, who let oil companies determine if sites need cleanup.

In Pennsylvania, where the petroleum industry was born with Edwin Drake's 1859 discovery of crude, Governor **Ed Rendell** more than doubled the number of well inspectors and has asked the legislature to impose more than $400 million in new taxes on companies pumping gas from the Marcellus Shale, a geologic formation that extends from New York to Ohio and holds enough of the fuel to supply the entire U.S. for 15 years.

"I think the whole future of oil and gas in this country depends on the companies having to pick up the last mess," said Elizabeth Burns, 43, who lives with her family on the Encinitos Ranch where Vavrusa was injured. "Places like Pennsylvania and New York need strong laws or this is what they're going to get."

Depression-Era Leases

Relatives of Burns and her husband, Stephen, own the ranch and much of the Kelsey oilfield beneath it. They've filed a lawsuit against Exxon and **Chevron Corp.**, which pumps oil and gas on a smaller section of the spread. The suit accuses the companies of damaging tens of thousands of acres and failing to abide by 1930s-era leases they say require operators to keep equipment clear of vegetation.

Irving, Texas-based Exxon said it spent $1.6 million last year on remediation at the ranch and has conducted numerous soil and water tests to mitigate environmental risks.

"We are a responsible operator and refute any accusations that suggest otherwise," said David Eglinton, an Exxon spokesman. "We currently have crews working to remove unneeded facilities and, where appropriate, remediate affected areas to applicable regulatory standards."

Chevron, the largest U.S. oil company after Exxon, "denies these unsubstantiated allegations and intends to defend itself in the litigation," said **Mickey Driver**, a spokesman for the San Ramon, California-based company.

Expensive Slog

If a judge finds Exxon and Chevron liable, they could be on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars, based on cleanup costs incurred at other companies' oil fields in California. The lawsuit is going to be an expensive slog, said Jeff Weems, a Houston-based oil and gas lawyer who has represented **BP PLC**, Europe's second-biggest oil company, in Texas courts.

"The legal route is a very long and difficult row to hoe for an individual landowner," said Weems, a Democrat who's running in November for a seat on the commission that regulates the Texas oil and natural-gas industry. "They generally don't have the resources to seriously take on the big oil companies that have legal departments that rival the largest law firms in size and quality."

The Encinitos spread, located 40 miles from the Mexican border, is dotted with scores of still-active gas pipes obscured by brush and saplings that haven't been cut. Beneath the dirt, the Burns family has found leaks and dumps they blame for undrinkable water and dead trees.

Defunct Equipment

Pollution from decades-old wells and waste pits isn't isolated to their ranch or Exxon. There are more than 100,000 old wells in Texas that haven't been capped and thousands of defunct gas-processing plants, compressor stations and related equipment that have never been dismantled, according to the Texas Land and Minerals Owners Association, which represents 1,200 ranchers, farmers and individuals who own stakes in oil and gas fields.

"It's a pretty common problem in Texas," said John B. McFarland, an oil and gas attorney at Graves Dougherty Hearon & Moody in Austin who has represented landowners with claims to 300,000 acres around the state.

In Benavides, a rural town 60 miles north of the Burns's homestead, local officials sent residents letters in late 2008 warning them their drinking water contains as much as four-and- a-half times as much arsenic as is considered safe by the U.S. EPA. Arsenic can cause skin damage, circulatory problems and cancer, the letter warned.

Contamination Migrates

The contamination may have migrated from a defunct oilfield on the north end of town, where sludge and other waste from wells was dumped in open dirt pits for decades, said J.T. Garcia, president of the Duval County Conservation and Reclamation District. He doesn't know who operated the field, which stopped pumping crude in the 1970s.

The Burns's ranch, which covers an area equal to the size of Brooklyn, is just one example of the lingering environmental damage across swaths of south, west and east Texas from what were once regarded as acceptable oilfield practices, said Patterson, the commissioner with the Texas General Land

Office, which oversees oil leases that help fund the state's schools and universities.

"They'd just dig a pit and put the oil in it and then they'd haul it off later, or maybe they wouldn't haul it off later, depending on the price of oil at the time," said Patterson. "That was the norm, and nobody said anything about it."

Heavy Metals

During the 1950s and '60s, oil companies filtered out some byproducts at the wellhead and dumped the refuse in dirt pits. That meant contaminants later buried when bulldozers covered the holes had higher concentrations of petroleum-laced substances and heavy metals than they otherwise would have, according to the Burnses and an environmental survey of the ranch carried out by Amistad Environmental LLC at the behest of the family's lawyers.

Exxon, which pumps more oil than every member of OPEC except Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq, declined to discuss the Burns lawsuit. The company has paid the family $19 million over the past two decades in the form of royalties, Eglinton said. Exxon has invested $190 million in development of the field since the lease was signed in 1935, extracting 130 million barrels of crude and 980 billion cubic feet of gas during that time.

The company's presence in south Texas has enriched ranchers and their communities, Eglinton said. Exxon paid $890 million in taxes and royalties to the state in 2008, and Brooks County, where the largest chunk of the Encinitos Ranch sits, relies on oil and other mineral taxes for 70 percent of its school and local government budgets, he said.

Price of Pollution

Those benefits came with a price measured in pollution that has languished, partly because state laws and regulatory agencies aren't designed or equipped to police **environmental performance** in the oil patch, said Weems and other critics.

The Texas Railroad Commission that oversees the state's oil and natural-gas industry allows companies to hire their own environmental consultants to check for contamination. Tests on the Burns property conducted for Exxon by Netherlands-based **Arcadis NV** gave the site a clean bill of health, said **Ramona Nye**, a spokeswoman for the Austin-based commission.

Elizabeth Burns had a different assessment.

"They buried it, muck and all," she said.

Jeanna Blatt, a Highlands Ranch, Colorado-based spokeswoman for Arcadis, declined to comment.

OPEC's Predecessor

The railroad commission, created in 1891 to regulate shipping rates, had its authority expanded to the nascent Texas oil industry in the early 1900s, when rampant drilling glutted world markets with crude and prices tumbled.

The commission began restricting how much each well in the state could produce, in a bid to prevent another free-fall in prices. When the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was formed in 1960, the railroad commission was its model, according to the **Texas State Historical Association**.

"It's a mistake to have an agency that was originally set up to serve the industry now being asked to police the industry as its environmental regulator," said McFarland, the oil and gas attorney.

The Texas legislature isn't inclined to crack down on the oil industry either, said Kelly Mcbeth, a legislative strategist at Texas Energy Lobby, an Austin-based firm that represents petroleum companies. Even wells that produce just a trickle of oil or gas are revenue generators for the state.

'An Economic Driver'

"Legislators do everything they can to keep those wells on line," Mcbeth said. "They're an economic driver for us."

The EPA doesn't intervene in pollution cases on active oilfields in Texas, said **Dave Bary**, a spokesman for EPA Region 6, which encompasses Texas, four other states and 65 American Indian tribes.

"The railroad commission has primacy over active oilfields," Bary said.

Exxon, which had 2009 **sales** of $276 billion that dwarfed the economic output of all but 33 of the world's nations, wants to seal the records in the Burns lawsuit, filed in December 2007. If Judge Richard C. Terrell of Texas's 79th Judicial District grants the company's request, it would shield from public view the details of how the company has operated on the land.

"The mindset of a major oil company is that they shouldn't have to compromise and you should be scared of them," said Roger S. Braugh Jr., the Sico, White, Hoelscher & Braugh LLC attorney representing the Burns family. "To prove our case, ultimately we're looking at spending tens of millions of dollars on environmental studies."

Off the Land

The suit demands unspecified cleanup costs and seeks to kick the oil companies off the land for breaching leases signed in the 1930s, said Braugh, who's based in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Vavrusa, the former ranch hand who now works for a company that tests pipeline meters, sued Exxon and the ranch for unspecified damages. Exxon failed to cut the vegetation that hid the gas line from view, and the ranch family didn't warn him the line was there, he claimed in his suit.

Exxon's Eglinton said it was premature for the company to comment on that suit.

Cleaning up a contaminated oil patch involves either excavating the soil and trucking it away, or fencing off the area to keep people out, said John Evans, chief civil engineer for Cannon Associates, a San Luis Obispo, California-based remediation firm.

California Cleaning

In California, the third-biggest oil-producing state after Texas and Alaska, state agencies and regulators have been pushing oil companies to clean up old fields.

Unocal Corp. was forced to spend $100 million to dig up a half-mile of oceanfront and to demolish and rebuild eight blocks of Avila Beach, California, starting in 1995 after subterranean pipelines leaked crude, gasoline and diesel, said Evans, who worked on the project.

The cleanup stemmed from a lawsuit filed by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, according to a Unocal filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. A yacht club, retail stores and pier had to be rebuilt at the company's expense. Unocal is now part of Chevron.

At another former Unocal operation in California, the state's Department of Fish and Game, the water quality board and the Department of Toxic Substances Control successfully sued the company over contamination of the **Guadalupe field** 160 miles northwest of Los Angeles, public filings showed.

Kerosene Leaks

The cleanup so far has cost $200 million to $300 million since digging began in 1994, Evans said. Before the field was shut in the mid 1990s, Unocal used kerosene to loosen deposits of thick crude. The kerosene pipes leaked, polluting the soil and flowing into the ocean, he said.

Eglinton, the Exxon spokesman, said the Unocal cleanups in California may have little in common with conditions in south Texas. "These are two completely different places," he said.

In Pennsylvania, the state has responded to a boom in gas drilling by Exxon and others with stepped-up inspections of well sites. The intent is to ensure the holes are properly lined with steel pipe and concrete to protect local water supplies from chemicals used to penetrate rock formations and saltwater that gurgles to the surface with the gas, said **John Hanger**, secretary of the state's Department of Environmental Protection.

Pennsylvania Scars

"Pennsylvania's had a long, long history with natural- resources extraction, going back some 300 years with coal and an oil industry that began in the 1800s," said Hanger, who before heading the agency was CEO of **Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future**, a non-profit group that promotes renewable energy and conservation. "Those industries left some scars on the natural landscape, and we're still paying considerable sums of money to repair some of that damage."

From the 1930s through the 1970s, the Kelsey field in south Texas attracted hundreds of roughnecks, engineers and their families. They lived in a work camp that had gardens, a school, swim club and the Cactus Club snack bar that specialized in wood-smoked barbecue, the Burnses said.

Humble Oil and Texaco, which were subsumed into Exxon and Chevron, drilled 555 wells on the ranch and laid thousands of miles of pipe to funnel crude to refineries in other parts of Texas.

Poisonous Toads

Today the Encinitos Ranch, which sprawls across parts of three counties, is home to poisonous Marine toads and rattlesnakes. The fat brown toads, when captured, are tossed into a pond to prevent the household dogs from eating them and dying; rattlesnakes are shot and hung over a fence for good luck. The dogs have scars from fighting with coyotes.

Stephen Burns, 39, wears a holstered handgun around the ranch for protection against drug smugglers who avoid Border Patrol agents prowling the highways by following pipeline routes that crisscross the property.

His wife, Elizabeth, estimates Exxon has damaged 12,000 to 14,000 acres of the 31,000 acres it holds under the 1935 lease by burying wastes left by oil production and allowing byproducts to leak into the soil. Chevron has damaged about 4,000 of the 7,100 acres it operates under a lease that dates to 1934, she said.

Her first clash with Exxon had nothing to do with oil. In October 2006, police discovered that a Mexico-based drug cartel was using the abandoned Cactus Club as a way-station for couriers armed with machine guns. The authorities asked the Burns to have Exxon tear it down.

The company declined the family's requests, Burns said.

"Exxon Mobil can't comment on the alleged 2006 request as we don't have any information about it," said **Margaret Ross**, a spokeswoman. "There is no current request from the landowner."

Bubbling Road

Burns began to focus on the decaying oilfield infrastructure after a second wildfire in March 2008 scorched most of the landscape, exposing the rusty pipes and other aging equipment spanning the ranch. That same month, an asphalt road on the ranch that ran alongside a former oil-storage site began to bubble with petroleum gases. Burns said she complained to Exxon and to the railroad commission.

Four months later, she triggered a radiation sensor clipped to the belt of a U.S. Border Patrol agent at McAllen Miller International Airport before boarding a flight to Houston. The agent determined the culprit was dirt on the soles of her boots laced with old crude and chemicals tracked in from the ranch. Since then, she said, she's been calling and emailing the railroad commission about twice a week with contamination complaints.

Addressing Concerns

"Commission staff is in regular contact with Elizabeth Burns and has been working with her since November 2008 to address her concerns," Nye said in an e-mailed statement.

A "majority" of Burns' complaints have been "addressed and resolved," Nye said. The five that remain open involve storage tank and pipeline leaks that the commission is monitoring "to assure that cleanups

are completed within a reasonable time frame," the spokeswoman said.

After the Burnses complained, Exxon dug up the road, which crossed a network of 44 pipelines. In October, a 9-foot deep hole about the size of a two-car garage remained, with a pool of brown muck at the bottom that had the smell and tell-tale rainbow sheen of petroleum.

Fifty yards from where the road once ran, Stephen Burns used a backhoe to dig a 6-foot trench in the soil. Within seconds, a clear liquid that reeked of motor fuel trickled down the sides of the hole. A clump of the dirt felt and smelled like the boggy sand that is mined for oil in Alberta, Canada.

Exxon filled in the bubbling-road hole in December and covered it with caliche, Burns said.

Benzene Found

The survey done in 2008 for the family found dangerously high levels of petroleum derivatives such as benzene, as well as mercury and lead, in soil and water samples from the surface to at least 40 feet down.

The family stopped using its tap water after seeing those results. Now they get their water once a week in 5-gallon jugs from a Farm and Ranch store in San Isidro, Texas, about 40 miles away.

Although lighter-weight hydrocarbons can degrade naturally in 40 or 50 years, the heavier molecules "are more persistent and pretty toxic," said Gregory Miller, project manager at Icon Environmental Services Inc., a Port Allen, Louisiana-based company that cleans up old oilfields. "You have no idea how bad some of these sites are."

Daunting Task

Patterson said cleaning up a tract as large as the Encinitos Ranch is impossible. Instead, the best solution may be to fence it off and monitor the pollution to ensure it doesn't migrate underground to other ranches.

"We need to somehow encapsulate it, monitor it, clean up the obvious hazards, whether they're fire hazards, whether they're leakage hazards," Patterson said. "I don't think you can totally remediate that many acres. It's not doable. It's just too big."

Exxon has installed water-monitoring stations at the ranch, said Eglinton, the company spokesman. He declined to release the results of the tests performed thus far.

Oil companies would be better off cleaning up their old operations in south Texas, Patterson said, rather than waiting for regulators or the state legislature to impose a solution.

"Exxon's walked away from a lot of this stuff they built here, but the evil lurks," said Burns, who had planned to raise organic vegetables when she and her husband moved to the ranch with their sons five years ago. "You'd hope your kids can do something with this land, but now it's worthless."

To contact the reporter on this story: **Joe Carroll** in Chicago at **jcarroll8@bloomberg.net**.

Last Updated: April 16, 2010 00:01 EDT

TimesRecordNews
Wichita Falls, Texas

Cleanup estimate less than feared for Patterson property

Cost forecast under county expectations

By Lynn Walker

Tuesday, December 14, 2010

Wichita County has gotten results back on environmental studies done at the Harry Patterson property adjacent to the courthouse, and the results are good as far as County Judge Woody Gossom is concerned.

"It's a surprise on the positive side," Gossom said Monday

The county is looking at the former car dealer location as a possible site for building a new jail.

Gossom said the projected cost for cleaning up the property is between $500,000 and $700,000 — below what Gossom had estimated and far below the initial estimate of the company that conducted the study.

The company, Risk Management Specialties of Wichita Falls, found two instances of higher-than-acceptable benzene contamination in soil sampling and three instances of higher-than-acceptable groundwater contamination.

"... the impacts appear to be small and localized," wrote company president R. Roland Ramsey in a report to Gossom.

Ramsey estimated the greatest cost in contamination abatement would be $275,000 to $300,000 for installation of a vapor barrier to "eliminate potential indoor air-quality issues associated with any subsurface vapor intrusion."

Other cost factors include asbestos abatement and removal of existing structures.

Commissioners entered into a contract on the land in July without making a price offer to the seller to have the land professionally inspected. Patterson was asking $1.3 million for the property, whose tax roll value is $468,000.

Despite the positive news in land assessment, Gossum doesn't expect the county to make a move on an offer immediately. Architects are looking at three possibilities to

resolve chronic jail condition problems: building a new facility on the Patterson property, enlarging the Sprague Jail Annex to house more inmates, or building an entirely new facility at the Sprague location on the southeast edge of Wichita Falls.

Gossom hopes to have results on the projected cost of each plan some time in February.

The county also is awaiting results of a study being conducted by the Public Policy Review Institute in Austin to determine if anything can be improved in the county's judicial system to shorten the length of time inmates spend in jail from time of arrest to adjudication of their cases. The backlog has filled both the downtown and Sprague jail to capacity and the county has resorted to housing inmates in other counties' jails.

He pointed out some changes that came about in the November elections in the district attorney's office and some judicial posts.

"We have new eyes that might look at things differently," he said.

Gossom said regardless whether changes in the judicial process speed things up, the county is looking at building some kind of jail facility to pass muster with the Texas Commission on Jail Standards. He said those requirements include a new food preparation area, an infirmary and a sally port where inmates can be delivered to jail in an enclosed area.

Cost estimates of building a new jail from the ground up range from $35-million to $60-million and would require a bond issue that would go before voters.

SE print version delayed as presses start late

Layton homes tested for volatile vapors

Last updated

Monday, July 5, 2010 - 10:51pm

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LAYTON -- Hill Air Force Base continues to sample the indoor air of Layton homes situated above shallow, contaminated groundwater plumes, as the base works to mitigate any volatile vapors coming off the groundwater.

Base officials attended the Layton City Council meeting last week to provide city leaders with an annual update of the long-term cleanup of Operable Unit No. 8.

That area, as defined by the base, is where groundwater plumes contaminated by trichloroethylene (TCE) and 1,2 DCA -- chemicals originating from a degreaser the base used for years for aircraft -- have flowed off base and into area neighborhoods.

OU-8 takes in the southern area of the base, and extends south into Layton and Clearfield. OU-8 was established in 1993 as part of a plan to consolidate all groundwater contamination under the base's industrial complex.

Based on the concern about vapors rising from the shallow, contaminated groundwater as cleanup of the plumes continues, indoor air sampling is occurring in hundreds of Layton homes near the base, said Lance Kovel, OU-8 project manager.

The limited indoor air samplings suggest volatile organic chemicals, including TCE, 1,2 DCA and chloroform, were found in indoor air in homes near the OU-8 groundwater.

The 2010 air-sampling statistics show 2,712 homes in cities around the base have been contacted, 992 of them in Layton, Kovel said.

Of the Layton homes, 223 have had air sampling performed. Only one of those homes detected vapor at an action level, Kovel said.

When a home is above the action level, the base does additional sampling to determine the location and source of the vapor, said Erik Dettenmaier, base air program manager.

"If it is determined it is coming from the base, we then install a vapor removal system inside the home," he said.

Having only one of the 223 Layton homes sampled this year showing vapor above action levels, Dettenmaier said, indicates base officials are doing a good job of mitigating the problem in the homes that have had vapor intrusion.

"As long as there is potential for these vapors to move up into homes," he said, "there will be air sampling."

Councilman Scott Freitag asked base officials about the disparity between the number of homes contacted, and the number of homes that allow indoor air sampling to be done.

Residents' unwillingness to participate stems either from the inconvenience and intrusion air sampling places on them, or the resident declining the offer is remaining ignorant in the event vapor detection could make it more difficult to resell their home, said Jarrod Case, remedial program manager for the base.

Councilman Barry Flitton said he would equate residents' ignoring the problem to people "burying their heads in the sand."

The council also was concemed about the safety of the city's drinking water.

The contaminated groundwater is limited to the shallow aquifer and does not pose a threat to the drinking water supply, Kovel said. The plumes the base is responding to are within 200 feet of the surface, he said, while cities draw drinking water from aquifers that are 600 feet deep.

Between each aquifer there is also a natural geological barrier preventing shallow groundwater from leaking into the drinking water, he said.

Current monitoring data reveals the contaminated plumes in Layton do not appear to be expanding, Kovel said.

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EPA revisits Williston's toxic underground 'plume'

WILLISTON — Twenty-five years after state investigators found evidence of a toxic waste "plume" 30 feet below parts of Williston, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has announced an aggressive, new investigation to track and — if possible — slow its spread.

Industrial-grade degreasing solvents trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE) present a moving target for regulators, said Karen Lumino, the EPA's project manager for the Superfund site; a thorough cleanup is "virtually impossible."

Wednesday night and Thursday morning, Lumino outlined for town residents the plume's health risks (low), locations for new monitoring wells (throughout a commercial and residential area west of Taft Corners) and the likelihood of cooperation from the alleged polluter (again, low).

Some questions posed by residents and town officials will remain unanswered:

• What are the chances of future health risks emerging?

• How will the EPA attempt to neutralize the toxic material?

• Will the plume affect future zoning or the installation of geothermal heat pumps?

New construction in the area using sealed, on-grade slabs since the 1980s has minimized the risk of exposure, said Michael Smith, who has managed the site since the 1990s for the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Waste Management Division.

"We've all been learning through this process," he said.

The last comprehensive mapping of the plume was completed in late 1999.

Smith and Lumino said the new wells, coupled with advanced geological "soundings," would allow experts to predict better the dense solvents' passage through the water table.

Some preliminary findings:

• The unnamed tributary of Muddy Brook that forms the eastern boundary of the plume tests virtually free of TCE.

• The plume appears to have traveled in a southwesterly direction from Commerce Street, at a depth (30-40 feet) that poses no immediate risk to surface water.

• Threats to groundwater are sufficiently high to advise against any residential or commercial well-drilling in the area.

• No vaporized TCE has been detected in buildings for 15 years (engineers remedied infiltration into a South Brownell Street dwelling caused by a constantly running sump pump).

• Mitec Telecom, the Lachine, Quebec,

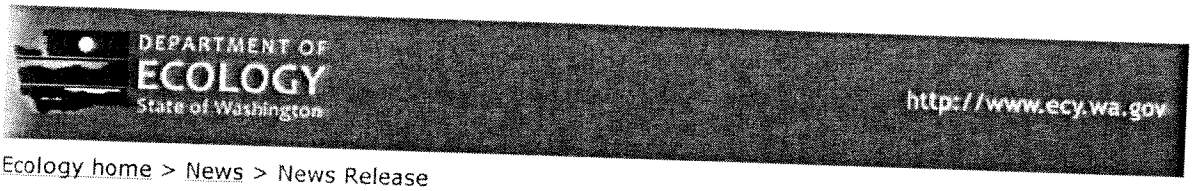
Burlington
FreePress.com

electronics firm charged with responsibility for the spills, this year agreed to contribute $120,000 toward the recent EPA risk assessment, which is expected to cost several million dollars. An agreement Mitec reached with the state in 1986 relieves the company of legal responsibility — unless more substantial evidence is produced.

"We can only go after Mitec if we can prove that there's a risk to human health, or to the environment," Lumino said. "I assume we have a future risk."

Acting on an employee tip, state environmental authorities in 1984 charged Mitec with spilling toxic solvents into an unlined lagoon at its Commerce Street facility. Subsequent investigations traced a larger plume of TCE and PCE to a leach field on the property.

Contact Joel Banner Baird at 660-1843 or joelbaird@burlingtonfreepress.com. Read his blog at www.burlingtonfreepress.com/BairdsEyeView and follow him on Twitter at @vtgoingup.



Department of Ecology News Release - February 9, 2010

10-021

Cleanup plan proposed for south Seattle site

WA

BELLEVUE – The Department of Ecology (Ecology) has proposed long-term cleanup plans for contaminated soil and groundwater within and surrounding the location of a former hazardous-waste processing plant in Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood.

Burlington Environmental, LLC (Burlington) is a subsidiary of PSC Environmental Services, LLC, formerly known as Philip Services Corp. The company operated the facility at 734 South Lucile Street under a joint U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Ecology permit from 1991 to 2003, at which time it closed. The cleanup site is often referred to as the PSC-Georgetown site.

Previous studies in and around the facility have shown that releases from past operations – including the storage and processing of waste solvents, petroleum products and other chemicals – have contaminated soil and underground water.

Ecology seeks public comment through March 26, 2010 on the cleanup plan and several related documents, including a new hazardous-waste facility permit, a legal agreement known as an Agreed Order that will incorporate the cleanup plan, several reports and studies on the contamination and cleanup options, and a State Environmental Policy Act determination of non-significance. These and other materials are available for review at:

- Ecology's Web site: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/foia/index.html
- The site's local document repository, ActivSpace – Luna Park Facility, 3400 Harbor Avenue SW, #214 in Seattle
- Ecology's northwest regional office, 3190 160th Avenue SE in Bellevue, by appointment, 425-649-7000.

Comments and technical questions should be directed to Ed Jones, site manager, Dept. of Ecology, 3190 160th Ave. SE, Bellevue WA 98008-5452; 425-649-4449; ejon461@ecy.wa.gov.

The facility's hazardous-waste permit covers "corrective actions" related to cleanup of contamination stemming from operations prior to its 2003 closing. Burlington has no plans to resume storage or treatment of hazardous waste at the Georgetown site.

The proposed cleanup plan focuses on the area east of Fourth Avenue South. The groundwater contamination plume from Burlington's site co-mingles with plumes from other contaminated properties west of that line. Ecology, Burlington and the other property owners are conducting tests and studies in that area that will lead to a future cleanup plan among the responsible parties.

The cleanup east of Fourth Avenue will build on previous steps taken by Burlington under the facility's existing hazardous waste permit.

A 1,600-foot underground barrier wall, completed in 2004, encircles most of Burlington's property. It extends 50 to 90 feet below the ground to contain contaminated underground water that otherwise

would migrate west toward the Duwamish River. A groundwater recovery and treatment system inside the barrier wall creates inward pressure. If the wall leaks, the system will draw groundwater in from outside the wall. Burlington also will continue a vapor intrusion assessment program. The company monitors nearby properties for vapors entering buildings from the contaminated groundwater. Where concentrations exceed a set threshold, the company installs systems to protect indoor air quality. Burlington has installed 30 such systems between its property and First Avenue South.

These measures will continue under the cleanup plan, which will add several other actions. Among these:

- Special nutrients will be injected through wells inside the barrier wall to promote the growth of naturally occurring bacteria that can eat some of the chemicals in the underground water.
- Paving and other surface covers inside the barrier wall's enclosed area will prevent precipitation from leaching soil contaminants and further contaminating groundwater.
- Burlington will remove PCB-contaminated soil from its northeastern neighbor, the Union Pacific Railroad's Argo Yard, dispose of that soil off-site, and install a surface cover on that property.
- On both the Union Pacific property and its own property, Burlington will perform soil vapor extraction to reduce levels of volatile substances in soils.

Long-term monitoring will provide regular reports on the performance of all measures taken under the plan.

Ecology's cleanup oversight of contamination from Burlington's Georgetown facility, which began in 2002, supports the department's ongoing priorities to protect the public and the environment from toxic threats and to meet the state's goal of protecting and restoring Puget Sound by 2020. Underground water in the area flows toward the Duwamish River, which empties into Elliott Bay and Puget Sound.

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For more information: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/foia/index.html
Fact sheet: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/foia/documents/pscgeorge/PSCpubnotice.pdf

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Last modified: Wednesday, February 10, 2010 11:06 PM MST

Contaminated water spreads to 70 homes, businesses

By Jodi Rogstad
jrogstad@wyomingnews.com

CHEYENNE -- Poisonous chemicals discovered in the groundwater behind a downtown Safeway store are actually part of a narrow, southward-moving, 20-acre plume that ends near the library, the state recently discovered.

As a result, nearly 70 residents and business owners within view of the state's Capitol were notified last week that levels of perchloroethylene in their groundwater exceed federal standards.

This was found in shallow groundwater and does not affect the city's drinking water, said Bonnie Pierce of the state Department of Environmental Quality.

The worst case scenario is increased cancer risk.

Vapors can travel upward through the soil and enter buildings through their foundations, Pierce said.

These residents and businesses qualify for free indoor air testing and, if needed, a free ventilation system -- a small fan and piping -- to remove away the toxic fumes.

Pierce said the goal is to significantly reduce the risk of cancer.

The alternative is to remove the chemicals with methods involving barriers and pumping and treating, but these are costly, she said.

Next week the Department of Environmental Quality will host a meeting to present more information, answer questions and collect signed agreements for testing.

The contamination was discovered in 2003 after Safeway bought the houses on the 2500 block of Thomes Avenue behind its downtown store. The company had planned to build a new store there.

Since then, the houses have stood boarded and vacant. Last week the state announced it had bought the 50-year-old store and the vacant properties for future office space. Safeway will close Feb. 27.

This fall, using the $2 million allocated by the Legislature to work on this and three other sites in the state, DEQ did further testing and found that groundwater contamination was much more extensive than thought.

The agency now knows it affects 30 homes and 39 businesses in an area south of Randall, east of O'Neil, north of West 22nd and west of Pioneer.

The problem is not expected to affect the plans for putting state offices in the old Safeway bulding.

This is considered an orphan site because the state can't single out and confirm the source of the contamination, Pierce said. It probably came from leaks and spills from multiple sources over a 10- to 20-year period.

But the state has identified 10 possible sources, businesses that are now gone from the area: dry cleaners, auto maintenance shops and a print shop.

The found chemical, perchloroethylene -- also known as "perc" or PCE -- is a common cleaning solvent and degreaser for auto parts and machines. This is a common type of contamination in U.S. urban areas, Pierce said.

Ikea Canada launches $8-million lawsuit over alleged soil contamination

BY GLEN MCGREGOR, OTTAWA CITIZEN DECEMBER 22, 2009

OTTAWA — Ikea Canada says a section of land where it wants to build its largest store in the country has been contaminated with dry-cleaning chemicals.

The furniture and housewares chain says in court documents that an environmental study found tetrachloroethylene (also referred to as PCE or "perc") in the soil under the parking lot at the east end of the Ottawa mall the retail outlet currently occupies.

The company claims the contamination is affecting plans to move its location from the west side of the mall into a new, two-storey building on the east side that will become the largest Ikea in the country.

Ikea has launched a suit against the owner of a small strip mall near the site, the past owner of the strip mall, and the owners of two dry-cleaning outlets that operated there until 2004. Ikea wants them to help pay for the cleanup. The lawsuit, which Ikea filed in July, claims $1 million in damages from each of the eight defendants, plus other costs.

Ikea's lawsuit has also set off third-party litigation between the defendants.

Ikea alleges that PCE and other hazardous chemicals seeped into the soil and water table from the dry-cleaner formerly located in the Baxter Plaza and migrated underground to the Pinecrest Mall parking lot.

Soil samples taken from the southeast corner of the property during a 2007 environmental assessment found concentrations of the chemical at 37 parts per billion, about seven times the limit for non-potable groundwater.

The owners of the plaza deny there is any problem with contamination from their property.

PCE is considered a probable or possible human carcinogen and in high concentrations can cause neurological problems and other health problems.

"The degradation products of PCE over time is also dangerous and harmful to humans and the natural environment," Ikea says in the lawsuit. "The migration of the PCE onto the Ikea property, which contains both retail operations and restaurants, poses a hazard which Ikea cannot properly address while the migration from the Baxter property continues."

However, an Ikea spokeswoman says the company believes the level of chemicals the environmental testing company found is not dangerous.

"We have been told that it is contained underground and that there is no risk to the health and safety of anybody shopping," said Madeleine Lowenborg-Frick.

Lowenborg-Frick said Ikea will pay to have the ground cleaned up, regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit.

One of the defendants, Baxter Plaza owner John Yang, denied there was a problem with contamination. He said that testing of his property, ordered by the court last month, showed "most of the spots are OK."

In a statement of defence, Yang and his company denied the dry-cleaning company contaminated the ground or groundwater and challenged Ikea to prove otherwise.

None of the allegations have been proven in court.