



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND  
MENTAL HYGIENE**

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*Commissioner*

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**Information on Radiation Survey at the Former Wolff-Alport Chemical Corporation  
1127-1129 Irving Avenue, Queens, NY**

**Summary**

The New York City Health Department will soon begin a radiation survey and Phase II investigation at the site of the former Wolff-Alport Chemical Corporation, in Queens. The US Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Brownfield Assessment has approved and funded the effort. It will start in summer 2009 and continue through spring 2010. The radiation survey and site investigation will examine Wolff-Alport's possible contamination of the site. The Health Department will share its findings with the community in a final report on the inquiry.

**Background**

In the 1940s and early 1950s, the former Wolff-Alport Chemical Corporation occupied what is now 1127-1129 Irving Avenue, on the border of Brooklyn and Queens. The company processed imported monazite sand to extract certain rare earth elements. The process generated a radioactive byproduct called thorium, which was flushed into the sewer until 1947, when the Atomic Energy Commission ordered a halt to the practice. The company then began concentrating the waste as a precipitate and selling it to the federal government. During the 1970s and 1980s, the New York City Health Department, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted informal surveys that found radioactive contamination within portions of the buildings and in the soil and sewers adjacent to them. The detected levels did not exceed regulatory exposure limits at the time, but federal exposure limits have since been lowered. In 2007, a joint survey by DEC and the Health Department confirmed that radiation at the site exceeded normal background levels. The Health Department concluded that a formal site assessment was needed and obtained EPA funding to accomplish this. The Health Department is now conducting additional surveys to determine whether exposure levels at the site exceed the new limits.

**What to Expect**

The environmental investigation includes three phases.

- Phase I (completed in July) involved a non-invasive survey of the streets, sewers and backyard areas using scanning instrumentation.
- Phase II will involve drilling borings into the soil under Irving Avenue, Cooper Avenue and Moffat Street.

- Phase III will involve surface scanning and drilling soil borings inside selected buildings along Irving Avenue between Cooper Avenue and Moffat Street.

### **Project Location**

- To the southwest: Irving Avenue from the intersection of Cooper Avenue past Moffat Street to the fence for the rail line. Boundaries are the far curbs of the respective streets
- To the northwest: Cooper Avenue (far curb of street) to a location even with the building behind (east of) the site
- To the east: Up to (but not including) the west wall of the building behind the site
- The sewer lines in front of 1127-1129 Irving Avenue and downstream as necessary
- For details on specific areas, see attachments 1 and 2.

### **Personnel Involved**

- New York City Department of Design and Construction (DDC) has hired two environmental consultants – Louis Berger & Associates, PC and CoPhysics Corporation – to survey the sewers and collect wipe samples from the buildings' outdoor surfaces.
- Personnel from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection removed and replaced sewer grates so that contractors could survey for radiation contamination within the sewer system.
- Health Department personnel will observe the process and address any questions or concerns that local residents and workers may have.

### **Work Schedule**

- **Phase I: Outdoor grounds, sewers, and building surface surveys**

The formal site assessment began on July 23, 2009. This phase of the surveying work involved outdoor areas including the sewer lines in front of the buildings on Irving Avenue, Cooper Avenue and Moffat Street. Initial survey results indicate that the sewer under Irving Ave. from Cooper St to Eldert St. has elevated gamma radiation levels.

The radiation levels encountered were not hazardous to health but are an indication of deposited radioactive material. Workers entering these areas will be required to follow a Site Health and Safety Plan (HASp) when entering these areas and/or performing excavation..

- **Phase II: Borings on the streets**

The second phase of the work will involve driving borings into the streets along Irving Avenue, Cooper Avenue, Moffat Street and the backyard of 1127-1129 Irving Avenue. DDC has retained the environmental consultants Louis Berger & Associates, PC and CoPhysics Corporation to perform the soils and groundwater testing. Zebra Drilling Inc. will handle the drilling and traffic control.

DDC and the Health Department will coordinate the street work to minimize inconvenience to the surrounding community. Work may take place at night and on the weekends. This phase is tentatively scheduled for some time in September.

- **Phase III: Building Interior Survey**

The third phase of the site assessment will involve surveying and sampling the building interiors. Work will commence when access agreements have been signed by all affected parties. In order to minimize work disruption, the surveyors may work on evenings and weekends.

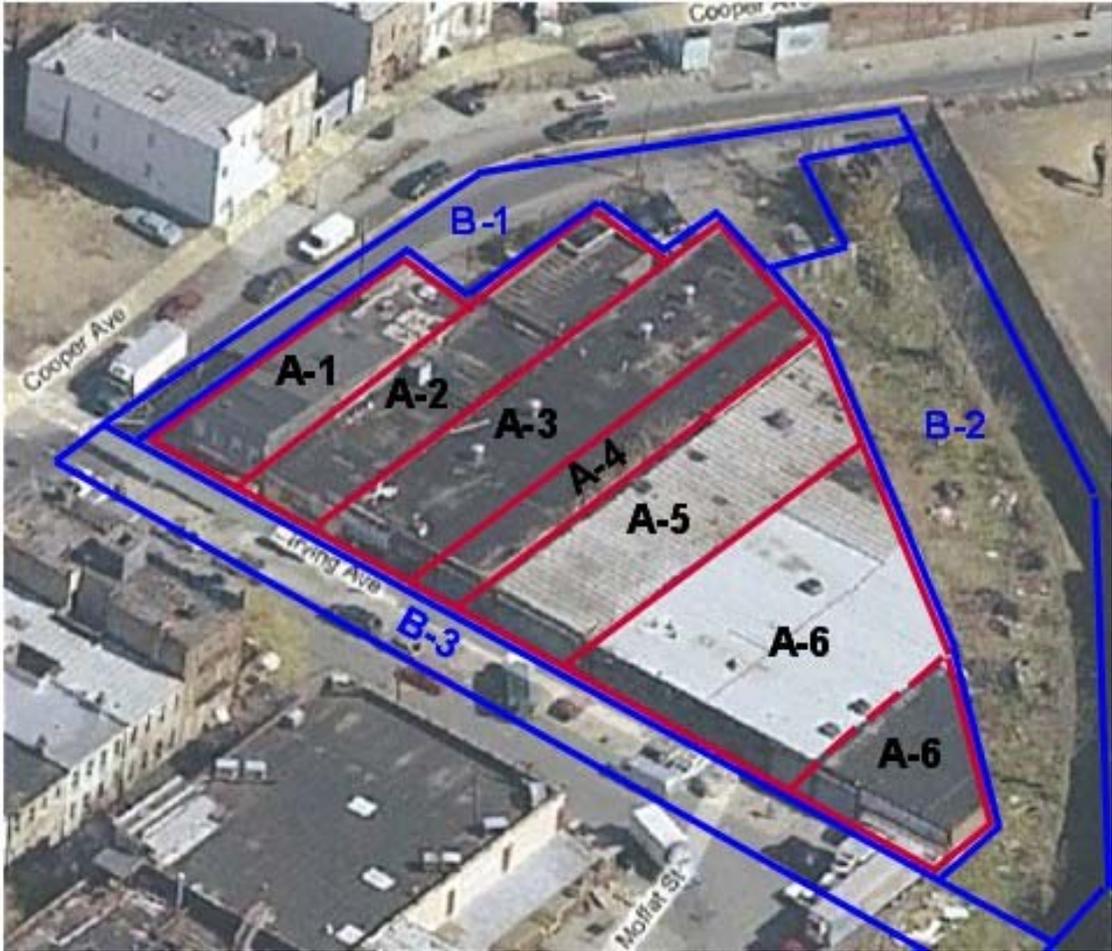
### **Final Report**

The Health Department will use the results of the assessment to evaluate potential health risks to the area's workers and residents. The agency's report and recommendations will be made available once the surveying and sampling are completed.

Questions about this site assessment can be directed to Sean Laffey, a radiological response specialist at the Health Department (212-676-1575)



**Attachment 1. Aerial view of the site as it exists today.**



Attachment 2. Preliminary Survey Unit Map (not shown is unit C-1 which is comprised of the underground sewer lines leading away from the building.)