

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Blackburn & Union Privileges Superfund Site Update

EPA Superfund Division

Spring 2009 Removal Action

EPA will remove asbestos and hazardous substances in drums and containers.

EPA, in November 2008, began an assessment of potential risks to human health in response to public concerns regarding the vacant mill building on South Street, as well as soil on an empty lot adjacent to the Neponset River. EPA completed this assessment work in March 2009 and determined the need for a short term cleanup separate from those previously announced for the Blackburn and Union Privileges Superfund Site.

Overall Site Status

After considering public comments, in September 2008 EPA decided on an overall site cleanup plan. The cleanup plan includes these major components: removal of Neponset River and Lewis Pond contaminated sediment; cleanup of contaminated on-site soil; cleanup of on-site groundwater which could pollute local surface water; restriction on future uses of the South Street on-site properties. EPA is currently negotiating with the potentially responsible parties that owned facilities and or operated at the site for the performance of the cleanup work.

Site History

The Blackburn & Union Privileges site located in Walpole, MA was added to the Superfund National Priority List in 1994. Industrial and commercial processes on the site date back to the 1600s. Between 1891 and 1915, the site was used for manufacture of tires, rubber goods, and insulating materials. The crushing of raw asbestos in the manufacture of brake and clutch linings occurred at the site between 1915 and 1937. Various cotton and fabric production processes were conducted at the site from 1937 until 1985.

Removal Assessment & Findings

The assessment effort found contaminants and hazardous substances inside the abandoned former mill building, including: friable (easily crumbled or pulverized) asbestos, asbestos-containing material, and drums and containers containing lead, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs), and ignitable and corrosive wastes. Because portions of the roof and many windows are in disrepair, and there is no fire suppression system, the friable asbestos and containers are a health threat to anyone on the site and may pose additional risks in the event of a fire. Found at the unsecured vacant lot were discarded brake pads and asbestos containing soil which also pose a health threat to anyone on the lot. Due to the threat to human health and the environment, a short term cleanup action under EPA's Superfund removal program is warranted.

Removal Actions

The removal action, conducted by EPA's contractor with EPA oversight, will begin in June and continue through the summer.

Work will occur daily from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday. As part of the removal action, neighbors will see workers securing the site to prevent unauthorized access. Such efforts may include staffed site security during non-working hours.



Abandoned former mill building



Abandoned drums inside the former mill building

Inside the Former Mill

The former mill building has been found by EPA to be structurally adequate. All visible friable asbestos and asbestos-containing material will be removed.

To prevent any air-borne asbestos from escaping during the cleanup, the building will be sealed. The asbestos material removed from the building will be stockpiled until the work is complete, at which time it will be trucked in sealed containers to a licensed landfill. The abandoned drums and containers will also be removed and disposed of at a licensed facility.

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Abandoned drums in western end of building



View of pipes covered with suspected asbestos-containing material

Vacant Lot Along Neponset River

Using a small excavator, workers wearing respirators and white protective suits will dig test pits to determine if asbestos is located in the soil of the vacant lot. Should asbestos be found within the soil, it is likely that a certain portion of the soil will be removed and then back filled with clean soil. Any contaminated soil which may remain at depth or which can't otherwise be safely excavated will be capped.

Air Monitoring

EPA will be conducting air monitoring throughout the removal effort to ensure the safety of its workers and the surrounding community.

Lewis Pond

Based on sampling performed, EPA determined that the contaminated sediment originating at the Blackburn & Union Privileges site has been carried downstream by the Neponset River and settled to the bottom of Lewis Pond.

The site's long-term cleanup plan does address the contaminated sediment within Lewis Pond. In the interim time before long-term work gets underway, residents should continue to avoid contact with Lewis Pond sediment.

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