EPA Orders Investigation At Former Chemical Site

BASF Site

Cleveland, Ohio August 2014

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has ordered BASF Corp. to investigate hazardous waste contamination at its property at 1000 Harvard Ave. in Cleveland. If the investigation reveals health hazards from the pollution, then BASF must perform a cleanup. The facility, which is no longer operational, was a chemical manufacturer that once housed uranium research and enrichment for the Manhattan Project atomic bomb development. In 1999, Congress ordered the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers to clean up the radioactive contamination at a number of sites specifically associated with the Manhattan Project. U.S. EPA and the Corps are coordinating their cleanup efforts, but each agency is working on separate pollution issues and have separate jurisdictions in and around the site.

Site history

The BASF site is 3.5 miles south of downtown Cleveland and occupies the western shore of the Cuyahoga River north of Big Creek. BASF purchased the location in 2006 but never used it for manufacturing. The site had been used primarily for chemical manufacturing since 1903. The facility is no longer operating.

Site contamination

U.S. EPA used its authority under the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, known as RCRA, to issue an administrative order to BASF for corrective action at the Harvard Avenue site. RCRA is our nation's primary law governing the disposal of solid and hazardous waste. The order listed documented releases of hazardous waste and materials at the facility. U.S. EPA determined corrective action was needed to protect human health and the environment.

Under the terms of the order BASF Corp. must investigate the type and magnitude of contamination on and near its property and complete any cleanup actions identified by U.S. EPA. BASF is in the investigation phase of corrective action. Under U.S. EPA oversight, the company will sample and test soil, buried waste, waste piles, groundwater, sediment and surface water for possible contamination. "Groundwater" is an environmental term for underground supplies of fresh water. When the investigation is completed, risk assessments will be prepared using the sampling data. U.S. EPA will then determine the level of cleanup required to make the property safe for its next intended purpose and will oversee BASF's implementation of required cleanup actions.

Radioactive waste cleanup

The entire site is not owned by BASF or under EPA jurisdiction. In the 1940's, Harshaw Chemical began processing uranium for the Manhattan Engineering District and later for the Atomic Energy Commission in the nation's atomic bomb program. The Department of Energy placed the site

For more information

For questions, comments or more information about the environmental activities at the BASF site in Cleveland, contact these U.S. EPA and U.S. Army Corp. team members:

Project Manager, RCRA
Carolyn Bury
Environmental Scientist
Land and Chemicals Division
U.S. EPA Region 5 – Chicago
bury.carolyn@epa.gov
312-886-3020

Community Involvement Coordinator
Rafael P. Gonzalez
Public Affairs Specialist
Land and Chemicals Division
U.S. EPA Region 5 – Chicago
Gonzalez.rafaelp@epa.gov
312-886-0269

U.S. EPA toll-free:
800-621-8431,
9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., weekdays

Outreach Specialist, FUSRAP
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-
Buffalo District FUSRAP Team
1776 Niagara St.
Buffalo, N.Y. 14207
Phone: 800-833-6390 (Option 4)
Email: Fusrap@usace.army.mil
Website:
www.lrb.usace.army.mil/Missions/HTRW/FUSRAP/HarshawSite.aspx

in the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program, or FUSRAP, in 1999. FUSRAP identifies, investigates and cleans up sites around the United States that became contaminated because of the atomic energy program in the 40s, 50s and 60s. The Corps administers FUSRAP.

Releases from the uranium processing conducted by Harshaw resulted in radiological contamination around the site, primarily around Building G-1, which is currently owned by Chevron Corp. Most of the radiological contamination is the responsibility of the United States Government and is being addressed by the Corps. The Corps. has scheduled Building G-1 for demolition in 2015.

U.S. EPA is coordinating with the Corps to deal with the chemical and radiological contamination found at the site and make sure human health and the environment are protected.

Aerial view shows the BASF site outlined in yellow.

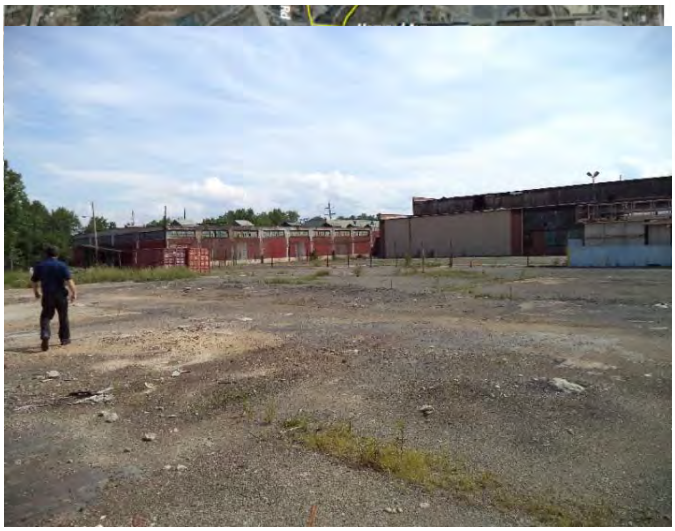

Photo shows some of the buildings on the BASF site at 1000 Harvard Ave., Cleveland.

Potential BASF building demolition

In 2014, BASF may demolish all of its site structures except for an operating groundwater treatment plant. Before the demolition proceeds, BASF will need permits from the Ohio EPA, the city and other local groups, and would have to identify hazardous or radioactive substances in the buildings and plan appropriately for the removal and disposal of the substances.

The building foundations would remain temporarily to prevent contaminated soil from washing or blowing away. BASF would be required to minimize movement of contaminated particles by using dust suppression and containing water used in tire washing. BASF has hired a radiation consultant licensed by the Ohio Department of Health to oversee the proper handling of radioactive materials.

U.S. EPA would impose and oversee requirements to minimize the movement of hazardous waste during demolition and monitor performance compliance.