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Clean-up continues at Moraine dump site

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Clean-up of ink drums containing high levels of lead and arsenic dumped near a creek in Moraine removes a threat to the drinking water source for 1.6 million people in the region.

“The removal action underway right now eliminates the risk to the public,” Mark Case, director of environmental health for Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County said. “Trespassers sneaking onto the property at night, tracking across the soil and walking through the water might be at some risk.”

Case said anyone concerned about exposure to contaminants on the property should consult a physician.

The environmental threat is to Opossum Creek, a tributary of the Great Miami River. The river is important surface water that may have influence on the county’s groundwater quality, which is the regions drinking water source. Clean-up of the site off Soldiers Home West Carrollton Road began April 29, a joint effort of the U.S. EPA and the Ohio EPA. About \$200,000 has been spent thus far on the clean-up of the Superfund site. The Superfund Program is funded with money from taxes on chemical and petroleum industries.

The clean-up is expected to continue all summer.

The U. S. EPA has determined the drums were dumped in the unlicensed landfill in the 1960s and 70s, then buried. As they were being covered with earth, drums were crushed causing contaminants to leak onto the soil, Steve Renninger, on-scene coordinator for the U.S. EPA Superfund Division said.

“The drums are sticking right out of the creek bank,” Renninger said. Some barrels were buried below the creek’s high water mark. At least one of the drums carried a McCall’s label, a Dayton printing company that closed in 1982.

“We even found a McCall’s printing plate,” Renninger said.

The EPA also found evidence that trespassers had dumped out dye, likely to scrap the metal containers.



The U. S. EPA began clean-up of hazardous waste and 80,000 tires along the along Opossum Creek in May. Steve Rettinger of the US EPA reports the clean-up is about halfway done.
TY GREENLEES / STAFF

“We can see the ink in the creek bed,” Rettinger said.

There were 50 to 100 drums visible above ground at the initial inspection in December. The U.S. EPA has since documented at least 280 drums and 50, five-gallon containers. The clean-up crew is about halfway done excavating the 10-acre site. Some of the drums were buried four to five feet beneath the surface.

“We go as deep as the waste takes us,” Renninger said.

Ink waste included: Lead as high as 233,756 part per million (ppm). Levels used by the EPA to trigger soil lead mitigation: 400 ppm. Arsenic in the waste tested 15,637 ppm. The action level is 22 ppm.

“This site met EPA criteria for a time critical removal action. That means we think we need to take action quickly and we did,” Renniger said.

Use of lead-based paints for homes, children’s toys and household furnishings has been banned in the United States since 1978. Lead particles that settle on the soil from leaded dyes can last for years, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry. The air quality on site also is being monitored for the safety of work crews and residents.

Renninger said the drums will go to a hazardous waste treatment facility and the contaminated soil will be tested, then disposed of at a hazardous waste landfill. Those locations have not yet been determined.

The illegal dump was discovered last year, when a neighboring property owner called authorities after seeing black smoke rising from the treetops. Scrappers were burning tires. When tires burn, they break down into hazardous compounds including gases, heaving metals and oil. About 30,000 tires have been removed from the site.

Timeline of Opossum Creek Drum Site, Moraine

1960-70s: Former dump, accepted construction debris, drums and tires

Fall of 2012: Ohio EPA, local health department and sheriff inspected the property due to reports of trespassing. Approximately 80,000 tires observed. Hundreds of partially buried drums with ink waste observed on the ground Signs of frequent trespassing including burn piles.

Nov 2012: Ohio EPA conducted a site visit and documented elevated levels of lead and arsenic on the site

December 3, 2012: Ohio EPA formally referred the Site to EPA to determine if the Site met the criteria for a removal action.

December 12, 2012: EPA conducted a site assessment at the property.

December 19, 2012: Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County formally referred the site to EPA for assistance.

May 1, 2013: Clean-up begins

June 19, 2013: Clean-up at midway point.

To report an illegal dump in Montgomery County call Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County (937) 225-4362.

“If folks are out hiking along rivers or creeks and see I site like this one, they should report it,” Case said. “This site existed for a long time. It may well be the sites are remote and the illegal dumpers are long gone.”