

NorthJersey.com PRINT THIS

Buildingevacuatedas fumesescape
Saturday, February 21, 2009
BY JENNIFER H. CUNNINGHAM
Herald News
STAFF WRITER

CLIFTON — Authorities evacuated a building where a federal environmental cleanup is ongoing after chemical vapors were released into the air and a chemical drum was found containing spoiled, volatile chemicals.

On Friday morning, crews were removing drums full of unmarked, improperly stored chemicals at the former Abrachem Inc. facility at 2 Peekay Drive, said Elizabeth Tottman, spokeswoman for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The crew opened a drum filled with an unknown chemical to take a sample. Fumes escaped from the drum, causing the level of oxygen in the building to drop and set off the building's alarms. EPA officials evacuated the building, which was also ventilated, Tottman said. Nearby residents were not affected by the fumes, she said.

Later in the day, a crew member opened another drum that was part of a cluster of eight or nine others, Tottman said. The crew member discovered that the chemical had crystallized — or spoiled — and was at risk of causing a reaction if the drum was moved or jostled.

"The chemical went bad," Tottman said.

The drums containing crystallized chemicals were left alone, and — as a precaution — EPA officials called in several agencies, including Clifton fire and police departments, Passaic County's Hazardous Materials Team and the county Health Department, Sheriff's Department spokesman Bill Maer said.

No was injured in either instance.

Tottman said the drums containing spoiled chemicals will be removed this weekend by an EPA contractor with experience handling crystallized chemicals. They'll be taken to a secure location where they will be sampled or destroyed.

"We're taking all the steps necessary to safeguard the community," she said.

Since last month, EPA contractors have been removing some of the more than

1,500 chemical drums that Abrachem Inc. left behind when it moved to Lyndhurst. EPA officials said the cleanup will cost between \$600,000 and \$800,000.

Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-Paterson, last month asked the state attorney general to investigate Abrachem because he said the company jeopardized public safety when it left the drums behind and saddled taxpayers with the cleanup costs.

Maer said county law enforcement will likely prosecute Abrachem Inc. for its failure to secure the chemicals.

Reach Jennifer H. Cunningham at 973-569-7162 or Cunningham@northjersey.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.northjersey.com/environment/environmentnews/40016677.html>

☐

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © North Jersey Media Group