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Investigation pressed
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CLIFTON — Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-Paterson, has asked the state attorney general to look into a company that abandoned 1,500 barrels of chemicals — some leaking — at its city facility.

Abrachem Group LLC jeopardized public safety by leaving the drums behind at its former facility at 2 Peekay Drive near Route 21 and saddled taxpayers with the estimated \$600,000 to \$800,000 cost of the chemical cleanup there, Pascrell wrote Wednesday to Attorney General Anne Milgram.

Abrachem, a chemical storage and distribution company, left last week after the property owner told the company it had to depart by year's end. It is now operating out of Belleville.

"By failing to properly dispose of the chemicals," Pascrell wrote, "Abrachem has compromised Clifton's public safety, threatened the region's environmental health and unjustly struck taxpayers with the bill to conduct a cleanup."

Pascrell visited the site last week and met with EPA staffs and local first responders. He said he would continue to monitor Abrachem's operations.

"Abrachem has been a bad tenant, an irresponsible neighbor and an unscrupulous polluter," Pascrell wrote to Milgram. "I believe in 'polluter pays principles' and respectfully request your office examine the situation."

On Monday, staff from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began removing the chemical drums from the Peekay Drive site. Some drums aren't labeled and are leaking, so EPA scientists will first have to determine if the unknown chemicals pose a threat to residents and wildlife. The remediation will take about four to six months.

Melissa Dimas, the EPA's community involvement coordinator for the Abrachem remediation, said the federal agency would first focus on safely removing and identifying the chemical barrels before considering legal action against Abrachem.

Abrachem Managing Director Tilghman Frey did not return telephone calls for

comment Thursday. The company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy earlier this month.

Pascrell's rebuke is just the latest development in a string of health and safety violations levied on Abrachem in recent years.

In 2004, the city fined the company \$20,000 for storing flammable chemicals without permission at its previous facility at 210 Clifton Blvd. The same year, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration fined the company \$8,505 for violations it said could have injured workers.

After Abrachem failed to pay its rent at the Clifton Boulevard location, the city forced the company out, according to Clifton City Manager Al Greco. The company then moved to Peekay Drive. In 2005, city fire officials attempted to shut down that facility when they discovered Abrachem was storing chemicals in quantities too large for the building's sprinkler system.

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