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EPA to clear chemicals at storage facility

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STAFF WRITER

CLIFTON — The Environmental Protection Agency today will begin removing 1,500 drums of chemicals — some of them leaking — that were abandoned at a local storage facility, officials said.

City officials said that Abrachem Group, a chemical repackaging company, left the drums behind in the last few months when they moved their headquarters from Peekay Drive to Belleville.

Some of the drums aren't labeled, and EPA scientists will have to figure out whether the unknown chemicals that leaked into the ground pose risks to residents, wildlife or firefighters, who could potentially breathe in fumes if a fire broke out during the removal process.

"Some of [the chemicals] are quite toxic," City Manager Al Greco said last week.

Residents who live near the facility received fliers last week notifying them of the potential risk, Greco said.

Abrachem Managing Director Tilghman Frey did not return calls for comment Sunday. The company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy earlier this month.

The company's Web site says it services the aroma, flavoring and chemical industry and that it provides drum-filling, packaging, warehousing and other work in its "state of the art facilities."

Greco said fire and other borough officials had been concerned about Abrachem for 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
<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=EPA+to+clear+chemica...> 3/4/2009

forced the company out, Greco said. It then moved to 2 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.

"We're kind of happy they're out of town," Greco said.

In October 2008, the state Department of Environmental Protection informed the EPA that chemicals had been released at the facility. EPA officials were denied access to the site until they got a federal warrant on Jan. 8. When they got in, they discovered drums and 43-foot shipping containers, at least one of which was leaking.

Last Friday, EPA representatives met with Greco, Deputy Fire Chief Kevin McCarthy and Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., D-Paterson, to discuss the cleanup and removal process. The work is expected to take between four and six months.

"What disturbs me to no end is the long list of violations," Pascrell said. "There is a pattern. It keeps on repeating."

Greco said Abrachem could potentially face criminal charges due to environmental violations, but because the company has filed for bankruptcy, it may not have to foot the bill for the cleanup.

The work will be paid for by the EPA.

In the meantime, both Greco and Pascrell said they would contact Belleville officials to notify them about their new tenants.

"We're going to be monitoring this closely," Pascrell said.

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