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## EPA cleaning up radioactive material at NF Blvd. site

AGENCY: Initial work to clear vegetation from wooded lot, additional tests for gamma radiation planned.

By Philip Gambini @philipgambini philip.gambini@niagara-gazette.com 15 hrs ago



The EPA has announced it will remove radioactive materials from the parking lot of the Rapids Bowling Center at 9524 Niagara Falls Blv and surrounding area as part of a "short-term cleanup."

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The Environmental Protection Agency has announced it will perform a "short-term cleanup" of radioactive material in the parking lot of a bowling alley and a neighboring building supply business on Niagara Falls Boulevard.

The EPA tested the area in 2013 and 2014 and determined that material contaminated with radiation was located beneath the asphalt parking lot shared by the Rapids Bowling Alley and the Greater Niagara Building Center next door. EPA officials point out that the occupied interior space of the bowling alley, located at 9524 Niagara Falls Blvd., is not contaminated.

The announcement is the latest for a property that has been eyed by regulators since the late 1970s, when local and state officials reported no public health threat at the site despite identified underground concentrations of uranium, thorium and radium, commonly called "radioactive slag" by the EPA.

EPA officials said Wednesday they will continue to inform the public of all planned actions at the site.

A radiation survey of the area conducted last summer found elevated gamma levels in several areas within the building supply center, a former Dunn Tire now operating as the Greater Niagara Building Center. The biologically hazardous, high frequency electromagnetic radiation appeared in areas near add-ons to the original structure that were constructed on top of the parking lot.

Though the site was deemed non-hazardous decades ago, future owners and state oversight agencies were warned that the surface integrity of the parking lot was to be maintained "so that the radioactive aggregate material remains fixed in place," former state Commissioner of Health David Axelrod wrote in 1979.

Axelrod's letters said proposed changes to the physical condition of the property must be reported to the state department of health. Nonetheless, fuel tanks buried at the former Dunn Tire location were removed in January 2001, according to documents obtained by the Niagara Gazette in 2006.

The work was done without notification, which a state health department spokeswoman, Claire Pospisil, said at the time was not a case of disobeying a DOH order, calling Axelrod's warnings more of a "directive."

The initial work announced by the EPA will focus on clearing vegetation from the wooded lot behind the bowling alley and building supply center. This area will be assessed for elevated gamma radiation and used as work areas for the cleanup, EPA officials said.

The second phase of work will be removal of material from the identified areas of the building supply center. Excavated material will be replaced with clean material and a new concrete floor will be installed.

Later, the contaminated material beneath the asphalt parking lot outside of the buildings will be removed, replaced with clean fill and repaved.

According to an EPA release, it's believed that in the early 1960s, "slag" – a glass-like, granulated industrial by-product enriched with low level, naturally radioactive elements – was used as fill material on both the bowling alley and building supply center properties prior to paving.

The testing in 2014 concluded that the site did not meet the minimum criteria necessary to be placed on EPA's "National Priorities List," a list of hazardous waste sites in the U.S. which are eligible for long-term cleanup financed under the federal Superfund program.

The decision to re-evaluate the site in 2006 came after the state health department was confronted with issues raised by a local researcher.

Former tourism advocate Lou Ricciuti pointed to a 2005 National Academies' National Research Council report which said even low levels of radiation are likely to pose some risk of health effects.

He also noted the role of many sites in the Niagara area which handled nuclear materials, information that was not revealed when the initial site evaluation was completed in the late '70s.

After the DEC was notified that work crews discovered soil had been contaminated around the withdrawn tanks in 2001, environmental officials then required the creation of a remedial plan to address the contamination near the former tank sites. Thereafter a representative of the county health department contacted the DEC about the radioactive contamination, spokesperson Maureen Wren said in 2006.

State health officials did not level any sanctions to the property owner's work in 2006.

The initial 1979 letter from Axelrod, which first laid out conditions for future property use, also promised the state would provide for a permanent solution to the matter following its original study.

Calls seeking comment from surrounding business owners and the operators of the bowling center were not returned.

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