

HAZARDOUS SITES CLEANUP PROGRAM Erie Coke Site

Introduction

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program is conducting an environmental investigation at the Erie Coke Site (Site) located in the City of Erie, Erie County, Pennsylvania. The Site is also located within an area designated an Environmental Justice Area by the DEP. The investigation will determine the level and extent of contamination present on-site and risks to public health and the environment. This fact sheet summarizes the status of site investigations and on-going actions occurring at the Site.

Hazardous Site Cleanup Act (HSCA)

HSCA provides the funding for DEP to carry out a number of activities to address releases and threatened releases of hazardous substances to the environment. These activities include investigation, cleanup, and monitoring at contaminated sites. HSCA also provides DEP with enforcement authority to compel parties who are responsible for releases of hazardous substances to conduct cleanup actions or enter into settlement agreements to facilitate response activities.

Site Background

The Erie Coke Site is an approximately 183-acre site located at 925 East Bay Drive in the City of Erie. An industrial manufacturing facility has operated at the site since approximately 1833. The first known coke ovens first began operating at the site in 1925. Erie Coke Corporation began operations at the site in 1987. The facility included 58 coke ovens, a coke oven battery underfiring system, two boilers, a byproduct tar recovery system, associated railroad lines, and a wastewater treatment system. Following a long history of violations of state and federal environmental laws, Erie Coke Corporation ceased operations in December of 2019.

History of Investigation

In August of 2018, approximately 600 gallons of wastewater from a finishing tank at the site's wastewater treatment plant was released onto the ground. In March of 2019, a large above-ground tank at the site's wastewater treatment plant failed causing a large volume of wastewater to be released. Known hazardous substances within the wastewater included benzene, naphthalene, ammonia, and cyanide. In July of 2019, DEP conducted a limited sampling event, collecting soil, surface water, and ground water samples at various locations on the site. DEP has documented the release and presence of hazardous substances in site soils, surface water, and groundwater at the site and determined that further investigation is necessary to identify any risks to public health and the environment.

Environmental Protective Agency (EPA) Emergency Removal

In September of 2020, upon DEP's request, EPA began a time-critical removal action to mitigate threats posed to the public health, welfare, and environment due to the threatened release of hazardous substances from the site.

EPA demolished buildings, removed, and disposed of waste, recycled appropriate scrap materials, and mitigated risks associated with remaining tanks, containers, and piping which posed the greatest threats. The EPA removal actions were completed in November 2022. EPA did not investigate the contamination in surface water, soil, and sediment, or subsurface groundwater and soil.

Environmental Site Investigation

The DEP contracted Michael Baker International to perform a comprehensive site investigation. Michael Baker completed a site investigation from September 2022 to March 2023. The final report was submitted and approved by the DEP in July 2023. The investigation assessed the surface and subsurface soils, groundwater, surface water, and sediments at the site.

Semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs) and metals were found extensively in soils across the site. Benzene was the primary volatile organic compound (VOC) of concern in the groundwater. Benzene was found in the groundwater in multiple locations across the site and the extent of the contamination is not completely known at this time. The SVOC contamination in the groundwater does not appear to be as extensive as that found in the soils. SVOCs and metals were also found in sediment samples collected along the Lake Erie shoreline. It appears that there is a large amount of man-made material, fill, or waste deposited across the site to build up the land. Additional site characterization is needed to determine the horizontal and vertical extent of the contaminants found in the soils and groundwater from the initial site investigation.

Next Steps

DEP is planning the following next steps: Phase II Site Investigation Work Plan Development; Phase II Site Investigation and Field Work Activities.

Additional Site Information

For additional information or questions regarding the Erie Coke Site, please contact the Department's Site Project Manager, Chris Saber, at 814-332-6074 or csaber@pa.gov.

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