

Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

Pool Doctor – Beaver Alkali Products

December 2, 2019

The Department provided a public comment period concerning the selection of the prompt interim response at the Pool Doctor – Beaver Alkali Products Site. Notice of the public comment period was mailed to the property owners and published in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* and the *Beaver County Times* on July 20, 2019. Written comments were accepted during the comment period, from July 20, 2019 through October 18, 2019. Written and oral comments were accepted at the public hearing conducted on September 4, 2019, at the Rochester Borough Municipal Building, in Rochester, Pennsylvania. The Department has compiled all comments, criticisms, and new data received during the comment period or at the public hearing, including those from the following persons.

Identification Number/Person:

1. Conrad Bianco
78 Beaver Street
New Brighton, PA 15066
2. Greg Muiter
694 4th Street
Beaver, PA 15009
3. Marcia Lehman
998 Mayfield Avenue
Ambridge, PA 15003

Each comment, the source or sources of the comment as identified by number, and the Department's responses are listed below.

COMMENT #1: (Received in writing on September 2, 2019)

The Cellar Dwellers have been performing in the third floor space for over ten years. There are props, costumes, and set pieces as well as studio equipment in the third floor rental space that we would like to get access to.

I came down to the site the night of the fire was told to leave by fire/medic. The next week I saw on Facebook the bowl was closed. No reason was given for the closure. I spoke with the DEP crew on site they informed me the building was able to be occupied. We had a show on the 9th of August 2019. The next week, one of our members got a call from Brenda, a worker at the bowl, and informed us that we were not allowed on site. I then called the DEP and again got

confirmation that the building was not on the list of off-limits areas however, the local government may have put the building off limits. (Commenter #1)

RESPONSE: The entire building, including the Bowling Alley area, is owned by Brad Davidson. Mr. Davidson is responsible for the safety of the occupants of his building. During the Department's initial access to the site, the side of the building housing the bowling alley remained open. After the fire and incident at the adjoining building on July 12 and 13, 2019, the Department notified Mr. Davidson that access to the remainder of the site needed to be closed until all chemicals were removed. The owner agreed to the building's closure.

During the public meeting/hearing, Department personnel discussed with certain tenants the possibility of allowing access to retrieve items from the building once the building is deemed safe and secure for general access.

COMMENT #2: (Testimony presented at the public hearing on September 4, 2019)

Conrad Bianco on behalf of the Cellar Dwellers. Mr. Bianco has questions about the status of the Beaver Valley Bowl building and access to the building. He is not sure whether or not he, or members of the Cellar Dwellers, are able to enter the building to access their equipment, costumes, and props.

Mr. Bianco also stated concerns about how the closing and limited access to the building was communicated. He would like to know who closed the building officially and how that information was relayed. (Commenter #1)

RESPONSE: See response to comment #1

COMMENT #3: (Testimony presented at the public hearing on September 4, 2019)

Mr. Muiiter testified that he was driving on Route 65 on the morning of July 13, 2019 in an open top vehicle when he encountered a plume of smoke resulting from the fire at the Pool Doctor Site. Mr. Muiiter stated that he was affected physically by the exposure and experienced symptoms including shaking, convulsing, eyes watering, and numbness in his fingertips.

Mr. Muiiter ended up calling 911 and was transported to Mercy Hospital due to his symptoms. He stated that he just wanted this event placed on the record. He also stated that he had just recently learned that there may have been bromine in the smoke that he was exposed to and would like more information regarding the "type" of bromine that he may have been exposed to. (Commenter #2)

RESPONSE: The Department does not have any specific analytical information regarding what contaminants may have been present in the smoke leaving the site on July 13, 2019. The Department's assumption that bromine may have been present is based on files retrieved from the site that describe the probable chemical makeup of the material that caused the chemical reaction. According to the files, the material is distributed by Lonza, Inc. and is known as

Dantoin. Material product sheets obtained from Lonza's website state that the active ingredient of Dantoin is 1-bromo-3-chloro-5,5-dimethylhydantoin, consisting of 64.73% Bromine and 28.72% Chlorine.

COMMENT #4 (Grouped): (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *There was a huge mushroom cloud. Green in color. Emergency officials urged residents within a five-mile radius to shelter-in-place but most residents were not informed.*
- *Numerous 911 calls were received (we heard over 50—must file a RTK at the Beaver Co Courthouse) and the Beaver Co Times noted that a motorist was experiencing severe breathing problems while driving through the cloud, called 911 and there was no response! What???? He later collapsed and received emergency treatment at Mercy Hospital, PGH. Was the Beaver Co 911 Center so inundated with calls that they could not do their job?*
- *RTK for 911 calls—need better publicity for SWIFT911 robo-calls to include population. Emergency response details – why were some notified and others were not?*

(Commenter #3)

RESPONSE: The Department is not an emergency response agency and therefore does not determine any of the 911 Center's policies or procedures. The concerns of the commenter should be brought to the attention of the Beaver County Emergency Management Agency.

COMMENT #5 (Grouped): (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *One of the buildings on the site almost collapsed the week of June 24, 2019 and prompted DEP to initiate an interim response under the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act. Any more details around this HSCA? Why wasn't more done to protect the community?*
- *The building had been vacant for 6-8 years. Why had it not been remediated?*
- *Where are the regulators? County level? Municipal level? Does the DEP have a role?*

(Commenter #3)

RESPONSE: The Department has the authority to remediate/clean up abandoned hazardous sites under Act 108, The Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act (HSCA). Proper procedures regarding HSCA must be followed before the Department can begin a response action at a property where hazardous substances threaten human health and/or the environment.

Once the Department determined that a response action was necessary and appropriate due to all the issues at the site, including the deteriorated condition of the buildings, the Department began

to acquire contractors. Under HSCA, workplans and site and office meetings must occur prior to any workers entering a building of this nature. This is particularly necessary when site conditions pose a heightened risk, as was the case here, given the complete collapse of the roof and back wall of one of the buildings during the workplan phase of the Department's response. The collapse of the heavy roof beams and other roof material crushed the drums of hazardous substances inside the building, allowing the material inside to mix with other material stored in the building. The Department's response action involved the removal of the collapsed roof, additional removal of the unsafe walls, clearing and grubbing of the surrounding areas of the building, and the construction of soil ramps to allow access of heavy equipment to the building. All this work was necessary to create safe working conditions for the contractors to enter and begin work within the building.

When the Department and its contractors conduct a cleanup or remediation at any site under HSCA, every effort is made to protect the public, the workers at the site, and the environment. Not every scenario can be anticipated or accounted for, even with the most well-planned project. The collapse of the roof at the site's building, housing as it did unstable chemicals, forced the Department to take a prompt interim action at the site. The spontaneous reaction of the chemicals that the Department encountered was not anticipated, and, even with careful handling, regretfully could not be avoided. The Department, its contractor, and local emergency management personnel responded and proceeded in the best way possible to deal with the fire that resulted from the chemical reaction.

The Department's investigation thus far indicates that the property owner stored hazardous and reactive chemicals improperly in a dilapidated building, leading to the collapse of the building, the mixing of reactive chemicals, and ultimately the fire that occurred on July 12 and 13, 2019.

The concerns of the commenter related to the role of local and county agencies should be referred to those agencies.

COMMENT #6 (Grouped): (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *DEP is aware of significant amounts of chlorine and other chemicals associated with a pool chemical business. What are these chemicals and the risks they pose?*
- *Find out what the health implications of exposure to chlorine and the "unidentified" chemicals are. What could these other "pool" chemicals be, besides chlorine?*
- *What can we say about the health impacts of this toxic release? Chlorine/bromine is toxic pollution. By the time it reaches your olfactory bulbs and you sense the stink, it's already in your bloodstream, traveling with every heartbeat to your brain, heart, and other organs. (quote from an MD).*

(Commenter #3)

RESPONSE: Based on the Department's review of files housed within the building and the testing of material for off-site shipment, the Department believes that chlorine and bromine were

the main chemicals of concern associated with the July 12-13, 2019 fire because Dantoin was present and that product is comprised of chlorine and bromine (see Response #3 above).

There are/were a multitude of other chemicals present at the Site, and the Department continues to sample these chemicals for hazardous chemical characteristics, in order to safely remove and dispose of them properly.

Any questions related to the health affects of chlorine or bromine should be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

COMMENT #7: (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *Sticky material damaged fire trucks. What was this sticky material? (Commenter #3)*

RESPONSE: The Department has identified no substances related to this incident that would cause a sticky residue to accumulate on any surfaces, Therefore, the Department cannot speculate on the sticky residue on the fire trucks.

COMMENT #8: (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *The risks Our neighborhood on Mayfield Ave in Harmony Twp. (Ambridge), approx. 7 miles from the site, was enveloped in the white chlorine cloud early morning of July 13th, causing nasal and eye irritation. Mayfield Ave is 3/4 to 1 mile east of the Ohio River. (Commenter #3)*

RESPONSE: See response to #6 above.

COMMENT #9: (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *What are the risks to first responders? We heard that the 1st responders had to wear protective suits that enclose the breathing apparatus INSIDE the suits, otherwise the chemicals encountered would corrode any metal outside the suit. How will they know or understand what chemical environments they are walking in to? Do they have the right equipment to protect themselves and the communities they serve? (Commenter #3)*

RESPONSE: First responders are required to go through training to select and wear protective gear when responding to incidents of this nature. The protective suits responders wear are designed to be fully encapsulating so that no unsafe air can enter the suit. The suits are also designed so that a user wears the breathing apparatus inside the suit, where it will be most protective. Also, when located inside the suit, the breathing apparatus is protected from harmful chemicals and the need for decontamination.

The risks to first responders are minimized by training and protective clothing that is made available and worn during incidents of this nature. The protective suits are designed to protect the occupant of the suit from the chemical environments that first responders may encounter.

COMMENT #10: (Received in writing on October 18, 2019)

- *The Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act (HSCA) provides DEP with enforcement authority to force the persons who are responsible for releases of hazardous substances to conduct cleanup actions or to repay public funds spent on a DEP-funded cleanup action. Are these people being held accountable? (Commenter #3)*

RESPONSE: The Department conducts a thorough investigation at every HSCA site to determine who may be responsible for the contamination encountered at the site (Potentially Responsible Parties, or PRPs). The Department is currently determining who the PRPs are for the Pool Doctor Site. After a thorough investigation is complete, the Department will use that information to determine how, or whether, to proceed with cost recovery efforts.