

Pool Doctor—Beaver Alkali Products site Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act Prompt Interim Response

SITE INFORMATION

Pool Doctor—Beaver Alkali Products site
One Brewery Place, 25 New York Avenue,
Rochester, Beaver County

HISTORY

The site consisted of a large building that housed a bowling alley, chemical businesses (including a retail pool chemical supplier), and a laboratory and a smaller chemical storage building. Many associated drums of unknown liquids and solids are corroded and leaking. The buildings were in a state of dilapidation and disrepair. The roofs of two buildings where the drums are located were collapsing. The smaller building [indicated by a red pin in the image to the right] almost completely collapsed the week of June 24, 2019, which is the reason for the Prompt Interim Response under the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act (HSCA).



PROMPT INTERIM RESPONSE

DEP was pursuing the site under HSCA, but the most recent building collapse demonstrated a more urgent threat. DEP determined the threat to human health, safety, and the environment warranted a prompt interim response and began work at the site on July 1, 2019.

DEP considered two options to address the threats at the site:

1. Take no action, or
2. Remove and properly dispose of chemicals existing at the site.

DEP selected the second option because it complies with the applicable or relevant and appropriate requirements [Sections 501(a) and 505(b) of the HSCA (35 P.S. §§6020.501(a) and 6020-505(b))] and addresses the imminent threats. DEP allocated \$375,000 for the investigation, removal, transport and proper disposal of chemicals on site and demolish or otherwise make the site safe for entry. However, the scope has changed following the fire and upon discovery of additional chemicals. An updated estimate is not currently available as the total scale of the required work is unknown, but DEP preliminarily expects the total cost to exceed \$1 million.

DEP AUTHORITY UNDER HSCA

DEP does not have regulatory oversight of the commercial or industrial handling, use, or storage of chlorine or other potentially hazardous chemicals unless they are stored and handled in a manner that causes pollution. DEP would inspect a facility for dangerous conditions if the facility operates under a DEP permit, or if a complaint were filed.

DEP first became aware of the site many years ago when staff were overseeing remediation of an adjacent property, the former Marino Scrapyard. At the time, the owner claimed that the business was still operating. In 2016, DEP received an anonymous complaint prompting a site visit and investigation. DEP tried to contact the property owner on several occasions seeking information but either received no response or insufficient information. As recently as a month ago, DEP received more information from the owner and others associated with the various businesses that operated there.

HSCA provides DEP with the funding and authority to conduct cleanup actions at sites where hazardous substances have been released. If the responsible party or parties are not taking appropriate steps to address public and/or environmental threats, the DEP or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can step in as funding allows to undertake the work necessary to eliminate threats through an interim and/or long-term remediation process.

DEP determined that there is a threat to human health from direct contact with the chemicals and hazardous materials on the site. The ongoing release of these materials from the site due to the continued worsening conditions of the buildings also presents a threat to the environment. The collapsed roofs allow rain and snow to enter the buildings causing release of the waste materials into the surrounding soils and, potentially, to the Ohio River. Proper handling of the known chemicals includes keeping the chemicals away from moisture, extreme temperatures, sunlight, strong alkaline or acidic substances, oxidizers and other chemicals, and organics or combustible materials. The conditions of the buildings indicate that proper handling was not taking place and had not for quite some time.

DEP EMERGENCY RESPONSE – July 12, 2019

DEP and its contractors began working at the site on July 1, 2019. An exothermic chemical reaction occurred within one of the buildings between 9 and 10 PM on Friday, July 12, 2019, causing a fire and fumes to be released into the air. Another reaction and release occurred the following morning. While work had begun to remove materials from the building prior to the fire, work was not active at the time of the reaction and subsequent fire, which DEP believes to have started in an inaccessible portion of the smaller building that almost completely collapsed on June 24, 2019.

DEP, its contractors, multiple fire departments, and Beaver County HAZMAT responded. Local emergency response agencies oversaw the extinguishing of the fire and issued a five-mile temporary shelter-in-place order as a precaution. Another reaction and release the following day prompted a temporary one-mile shelter-in-place order.

Following this incident, DEP consulted with the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) and requested information on health effects. DOH recommends that persons having trouble breathing call 911 for immediate assistance. If you are concerned about your personal health concerning this exposure event, please contact your primary care doctor. If you have any questions about the impact of this event on public health, please contact the Pennsylvania Department of Health at env.health.concern@pa.gov. Additional information is posted on DEP's website listed below.

NEXT STEPS

As of September 3, 2019, DEP's contractors had removed, neutralized, and disposed of most of the chemicals and debris from the building that ignited. The building had to be demolished to enable complete removal of the chemicals stored within. The footprint of the building has been filled and graded to eliminate physical hazards.

DEP awaits a structural survey prior to beginning work on the larger building, which also has a collapsed roof, contains additional chemicals and a laboratory. Public access to the site remains restricted while work continues.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Administrative Record is open for review and comment until October 18, 2019. Administrative Record hard copy reviews are by appointment only, 9 AM – 4 PM, Monday – Friday. Call (412) 442-4000 for an appointment with Regional Files, located at the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Southwest Regional Office, 400 Waterfront Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15222. A digital copy of the Administrative Record is available on DEP's regional webpage, at www.dep.pa.gov/southwest under the Pool Dr--Beaver Alkali Products HSCA tab. Written comments on the Administrative Record may be directed to Terry Goodwald, Project Manager at the address above.