



News for Immediate Release

Nov. 17, 2010

DEP to Hold Public Hearing on Cleanup of Plumstead Fire Site

State Uses Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act After Owners Fail to Comply with Order

Norristown – The Department of Environmental Protection will host a public hearing to accept comments on its plan to provide safe drinking water to residents whose wells were contaminated after a June 29 warehouse fire at 5189 Stump Road.

The hearing will begin at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 14, at the Plumstead Township Municipal Building at 5186 Stump Road, Plumsteadville, PA 18949.

DEP has proposed drilling deeper replacement wells for seven residences on Stump Road and Ann Drive, and providing new filters for four additional households on Ann Drive. Replacement well drilling is underway. The new well and filtration remedies are expected to be completed by the end of the month, weather permitting. Properties that are disturbed by drilling will be graded this fall and re-vegetated in the spring.

In July, DEP learned of contaminated wells near the site of the fire that destroyed Custom Particle Reduction, Inc., a processor of food additives. Through extensive testing over several months, the department established a link between private well contamination and materials that were present at 5189 Stump Road when the fire occurred.

At the time of the fire, Custom Particle Reduction's inventory included 160,000 pounds of sodium benzoate, a commonly used preservative. Early rounds of sampling revealed elevated levels of benzene, sodium, antimony, manganese and benzoic acid in nearby ponds that had received runoff from firefighting activities.

Benzoic acid, a breakdown product of sodium benzoate—along with other contaminants found in the ponds—was also found in some residential wells.

In early August, DEP issued an order to Dennis K. Rice, Dale L. Cotton and Douglas R. Patridge, owners of the 5189 Stump Road property, along with Custom Particle Reduction, Inc., requiring them to provide potable water to several residents with contaminated wells; remediate the ponds; and determine the extent of the contamination.

The owners failed to comply with portions of the order, forcing DEP to move forward with the investigation and cleanup work under the authority of the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act, a 1988 law that authorizes DEP to perform cleanups and recover the costs from responsible parties. DEP also began providing potable water to 11 homes.

DEP collected additional samples from nearby ponds and private water wells in September and October near the site of the fire. Although contaminant levels in these well samples diminished over time, several wells still required treatment or replacement as of the end of October. Based on that last round of sampling, the department has determined the appropriate remedy for each affected property.

In early November, DEP drilled a 380-foot test well at a residence on Ann Drive to determine whether the region's deeper aquifer could be used to provide safe drinking water. Replacement wells will be constructed to use water from the deeper aquifer without influence from surface contamination.

Those interested in presenting comments at the Dec. 14 hearing can register in advance by calling DEP Community Relations Supervisor Deborah Fries at 484-250-5808.

DEP will accept written comments until Feb. 14, 2011. The comments should be sent to Bonnie McClennen, HSCA project officer, DEP Southeast Regional Office, 2 E. Main St., Norristown, PA 19401-4915.

For more information, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us or call 484-250-5900.

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