

Hiteman Leather Co.

New York

EPA ID#: NYD981560915

EPA REGION 2 Congressional District(s): 23

Herkimer
Village of West Winfield

NPL LISTING HISTORY
Proposed Date: 9/29/1998
Final Date: 1/19/1999

Site Description

The Hiteman Leather Company site is located on South Street (Route 51) in the Village of West Winfield, near the intersection of Route 51 with Route 20. The former leather tanning site is approximately 12 acres in size and is bordered to the north by private residences and commercial buildings along Route 20, to the east by Route 51, to the west by the West Winfield Cemetery and to the south by residential properties. Approximately 800 feet of the Unadilla River traverses the lower part of the site, with two of the 12 acres on the south bank of the river. Prior to the recent cleanup activities, the northern 10 acres of the site included the foundations/concrete pads of the former factory buildings, a macadam parking lot, two buildings (a garage and small shed), three backfilled wastewater lagoons (each approximately 50 feet wide by 350 feet long), a 2-acre wetland, a 4-acre open field area, and a small backfilled area in front of an adjacent Village Department of Public Works garage. Since the site cleanup, the foundation area, lagoon area, and open-field area have been covered with 2-feet of soil, graded and revegetated, and the small shed has been removed. The southern 2 acres remains undeveloped and is located mostly in a floodplain.

The site was operated as a leather tannery from 1820 until 1968, when it was closed. Over the years, the leather tanning industry developed from a tree bark-based tanning process to include a chromium-based process, which was adopted in Hiteman tannery operations in 1916. By 1964, approximately 180,000 gallons of chromium-containing wastewater was discharged daily from the tannery into three unlined settling lagoons, which ultimately drained into the Unadilla River. At various times, the effluent also drained into the wetlands adjacent to the lagoons, which then drained into the Unadilla River. Settled solids in the lagoons were periodically excavated and deposited as bank material around the lagoons. The lagoons were backfilled in 1968 (using the bank material) and the site has been inactive ever since, with the exception of the use of the buildings, mainly, for storage during 1969-82. The tannery buildings were demolished in 1996 and 1998. Approximately 900 people live within one-half mile of the site.

Site Responsibility: This site is being addressed through federal actions.

Threat and Contaminants

In August 1959, a fish kill occurred in the Unadilla River near the Hiteman Leather Company facility. An investigation concluded that the fish were killed by toxic substances overflowing from two lagoons on the site. As a result, the lagoons were dredged and a third lagoon was added. However, the inability to reliably achieve wastewater discharge standards required closing of the facility in 1968. Site investigations by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation during 1988-1992 and samples taken by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1994 and 1996 found high levels of chromium in the lagoon area and surrounding soils (including the wetlands) and in river sediments. Metals were also detected in site soils and sediments. Although contaminants were found in the ground water, they were subsequently determined to be naturally occurring. Further investigation indicated the deteriorating buildings were unsafe and that pipe covering and other materials throughout the structures were asbestos-based. In addition, concerns were raised over the potential erosion of the north bank of the Unadilla River that could release toxic substances from the former lagoons.

Cleanup Approach

This site is being addressed in two stages: immediate actions and a long-term remedial phase that will focus on the cleanup of the entire site.

Response Action Status

Immediate Actions: The northern 10-acres of the site were fenced during 1994 to limit access by the public. A structural evaluation in 1996 determined that the wood-frame sections of the main tannery building and the smokestack were structurally unsound. Demolition of the wood-frame sections was performed by EPA during 1996. Asbestos was removed from the buildings prior to demolition and the asbestos was disposed of at an approved off-site disposal facility. In addition, approximately 600 linear feet of riprap was installed along the northern bank of the Unadilla River during November 1996 to insure the river bank's stability. The remaining concrete and steel parts of the tannery building was demolished by the estate of the former owner in 1998.

Entire Site: A remedial investigation (RI) to determine the nature and extent of the contamination at and emanating from the site was completed in 2006. Four rounds of sampling were completed in on-site and off-site locations, with each subsequent sampling round being designed based on information from the prior round. As a result of this effort, a baseline ecological risk assessment was also conducted, with samples taken from the on-site wetland and downstream locations of the Unadilla River to further define the ecological risk arising from the elevated levels of chromium found in these areas. A feasibility study (FS) for the site was conducted in 2006 to identify and evaluate remedial alternatives to cleanup the site.

Based upon the results of the RI/FS, on September 28, 2006, a Record of Decision (ROD) was signed, selecting a remedy for the site. The selected remedy included excavation of contaminated soil hot spots from the former tannery property, excavation/dredging of contaminated wetland and river sediments located adjacent to the former tannery property, solidification (the addition of cement additives to change the physical and chemical characteristics in order to immobilize contaminants) and consolidation of the excavated/dredged soils and sediments on the former tannery property, placement of a soil cover, and intermittent groundwater extraction and treatment. The ROD also indicated that the need for the remediation of river sediments in areas downstream of the former tannery would be determined based upon further testing.

During the design of the remedy, it was determined that the soils did not require solidification prior to disposal, that the downstream sediments did not need to be remediated, and that the contamination present in the groundwater was not related to disposal activities at the site (therefore, it did not require remediation). These changes to the remedy were documented in June and September 2008 Explanations of Significant Differences.

The cleanup of the site was completed in September 2008.

Long-term monitoring at the site is currently underway.

Site Facts: A potentially responsible party (PRP) search was conducted; no viable PRPs were identified.

In September 2003, EPA provided the Village of West Winfield with funding to develop a reuse assessment and redevelopment plan for the Hiteman Leather site, as part of the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund Redevelopment Initiative. A Community Advisory Board committee was formed to represent stakeholders. An extensive community survey was conducted by the committee and the recommended reuse of the site by the community was identified in The Village's "Reuse Assessment and Redevelopment Plan for the Hiteman Leather Superfund Site." The redevelopment plan was considered in the selection of a remedy for the site. The construction of the remedy and its final stages were done in consultation with the Village for consistency with redevelopment plans.

Cleanup Progress

The fencing of the site, demolition of the deteriorated buildings and smokestack, removal of asbestos from the site and stabilization of the river bank mitigated the immediate threat posed by the site. The remedy was completed in September 2008.

Site Repositories

West Winfield Library, Bisby Hall, 179 South Street, West Winfield, NY 13491

EPA Region 2 Superfund Records Center, 290 Broadway, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10007-1866