



Risk Assessment Completed; Cleanup Plans Being Developed

St. Regis Paper Co. Superfund Site

Leech Lake Reservation

Cass County, Minnesota

September 2009

Public meeting scheduled

You are invited to a public meeting about the St. Regis Paper Co. site:

Tuesday, Sept. 22, 6:30 p.m.

Cass Lake-Bena Elementary School

15 4th St., N.W.

Cass Lake

Contact information

Don de Blasio

Community Involvement Coordinator

312-886-4360

deblasio.don@epa.gov

Tim Drexler

Remedial Project Manager

312-353-4367

drexler.timothy@epa.gov

Toll-free 800-621-8431,

8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., weekdays

Information repositories

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Division of Resource Management

6530 Highway 2 N.W.

Cass Lake

Cass Lake Library

223 Cedar Ave.

Cass Lake

Bemidji State University Library

1501 Birchmont Drive N.E.

Bemidji

Cass Lake City Clerk

332 Second St. N.W.

Cass Lake

Leech Lake Tribal College

6945 Little Wolf Road

Cass Lake

On the Web:

www.epa.gov/region5/sites/stregis

A document called a “feasibility study” will soon help U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommend a cleanup plan for the St. Regis Paper Co. Superfund site. International Paper Co. and BNSF Railway are working to complete the study for EPA and its support agency partners, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

The feasibility study presents and evaluates potential cleanup options. EPA expects the study to be completed by mid-September. After EPA has reviewed and approved the document, the Agency will conduct a public hearing in Cass Lake to present its recommended cleanup plan. Local residents will have an opportunity to comment on the recommendation at the public hearing – expected to be held early in 2010 – and during a public comment period.

Two additional parties responsible for cleanup of the site, the city of Cass Lake and Cass Forest Products, have declined to participate.

Risk assessment

EPA will hold a public meeting Tuesday, Sept. 22 (see box, left) to discuss the preliminary feasibility study as well as a human health and ecological risk assessment that was completed Aug. 15. This risk assessment found the site still poses health risks to people. While some temporary measures have been taken to reduce these risks, the feasibility study will outline more permanent options. It will also explain potential ways to deal with an area of ecological risk near the on-site containment vault.

Ecological risks at the Fox Creek area are being evaluated further. Under the oversight of EPA and the Leech Lake Band, IP conducted additional sediment sampling during fall 2008. A 28-day test of the collected samples was done to determine whether the Fox Creek sediments are toxic to animals. EPA is interpreting those test results to complete the ecological risk assessment. The results of that work will be used to finalize the ecological portion of the risk assessment, and if necessary, cleanup alternatives will be evaluated for this area.

Continuing ground water study

Ongoing IP site operations continue to monitor contaminated ground water removal and treatment, as well as the ground water away from the system, under EPA and support agency oversight. Annual reviews show contaminants are generally captured by the ground-water treatment system, but there are some indications that capture may not be complete at all times.

Studies are under way to check for this problem at the former city dump area and the former operations area. IP is preparing a report on an investigation related to ground-water contamination in the city dump area, which was conducted in 2008 and 2009. EPA will review this report when it is completed. An additional investigation of ground water capture between the former operations area and Pike Bay is also planned.

In the area of the Leech Lake Band Division of Resource Management buildings, a study of the subsurface related to the Leech Lake Band fish hatchery wells is complete.

One of the probe locations at the southwest corner of the soil containment vault showed site-related contaminants at depth. Based upon its depth, it appears the contamination is from before the construction of the vault. The nature of the contamination and its source will be further evaluated as a part of site cleanup. Three new monitoring wells were constructed around the soil containment vault and one new monitoring well was constructed on DRM property. These wells will be used to provide information on ground water flow direction and to monitor the presence of contaminants. A pumping test of the hatchery wells will be conducted this fall to determine the area of influence of hatchery well pumping and ground water properties.

Recently, ground-water sampling was conducted along the location of the Enbridge pipeline scheduled for construction later this year. The pipeline will be located north of the St. Regis Superfund site. The results of that sampling will provide additional information on the former operations area ground water plume.

Next steps

The feasibility study will result in a list of cleanup options for the St. Regis site. In consultation with the Leech Lake Band and MPCA, EPA will pick a recommended cleanup plan from those options and open the process to public comment. After a period of review and comment on the recommended cleanup plan, EPA will make a final cleanup choice in a document called "record of decision." Plans to carry out that decision will then be developed so the actual cleanup can begin.

History and background

The St. Regis site, in the city of Cass Lake, is within the boundaries of the Leech Lake Band's reservation. It includes a former wood treatment plant, which operated from 1958 until 1984, and affected adjacent areas. St. Regis was listed on the National Priorities List in 1984, making it eligible for cleanup under EPA's Superfund program.

The site has four primary sections:

- Northwest portion of the former operations area.
- Southwest operations area and location of an on-site vault.
- Former Cass Lake dump that accepted site wastes.
- Residential area surrounding the site.

MPCA originally had the lead for site cleanup. During the late 1980s, MPCA required then-owner Champion Paper Co. to conduct the following cleanup actions:

- Connect nearby residents to city water.
- Create a vault for excavated contaminated soil and sludge.
- Create a ground-water extraction system with monitoring wells to contain contaminated underground water plumes in the former operations and former city dump areas.

In 1994, site responsibility transferred to EPA at the request of the Leech Lake Band.

In 2001 and 2003, soil sampling conducted after a major review of the site uncovered new problems with dioxin concentrations. Dioxin levels in shallow soil on the site exceeded EPA's 1998 dioxin policy for residential limits of 1,000 parts per trillion. In 2004, EPA ordered IP to conduct a human health and ecological risk assessment. The company sampled for contaminated dust in residences as a part of the risk assessment. The results showed an increased risk to residents near the site. In response, IP agreed to clean up contaminated dust in nearby residences.

In 2004 and 2005, IP removed 3,394 tons of contaminated soil from the site based on the 2001 and 2003 sampling. In 2006, IP installed a gravel cover and a fence to prevent access to a commercial portion of the site. BNSF removed an additional 680 tons of contaminated soil from its property in 2006.

Also in 2006 with EPA oversight, IP completed a system-wide pumping test of 72 monitoring wells and all 13 extraction wells. During January and February 2008, IP carried out more investigations that resulted in new monitoring wells being added in the former Cass Lake city dump. The work was done because of the discovery of a tar plume in addition to a light plume already known to exist. Later this year IP will test water wells belonging to the Leech Lake Band. After the testing, the new information will be used to develop computer models to evaluate the effectiveness of the ground water extraction and monitoring system.