



St. Regis Cleanup to Begin in Spring

St. Regis Paper Superfund Site
Cass Lake, Minn.

February 2004

More information about the St. Regis site

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ordered International Paper Co. to start removal of contaminated soil on city property in Cass Lake, Minn. IP has agreed to comply with the mandate, which is called a unilateral administrative order.

Under terms of the administrative order, International Paper must start work on eight known hotspots contaminated with levels of the chemicals dioxin and furan exceeding 1 part per billion. That level is EPA's guideline for cleanup of residential areas.

In addition to soil removal, tasks that IP must perform include:

- installing safety fence around excavation areas that remain in place until sampling confirms that dioxin levels have been reduced to EPA standards
- disposing of soil at an EPA-approved landfill
- collecting more samples to confirm removal of contaminated soil with more than 1ppb of dioxin
- covering excavated areas with a special fabric until tests verify that dioxin/furan levels in remaining soil do not exceed 1 ppb

International Paper must continue removal activities until sampling results show that dioxin/furan levels do not exceed 1 ppb on or next to these hotspots. The company has chosen Peoria Disposal Co., Peoria, Ill., to dispose of the contaminated soil.

Because of the nature of the planned cleanup, work is scheduled to begin in June when weather and road conditions are right. The work must be carried out without major snow cover or frozen soil. Federal and state agencies want to be sure that pollution will not be spread by snow melting through contaminated soil and leaking from hauling vehicles. The agencies also want to be sure that soil is dry enough to minimize damage to roads and property, such as grass damage and ruts. The Minnesota Department of Transportation prohibits heavy loads on state roads until late spring.

Federal, tribal and state agencies will continue their review of the area for possible long-term human health and environmental risks related to the site while the cleanup is taking place.

Background

The St. Regis Superfund site is a closed wood-treating facility. In the late 1950s, the St. Regis company carried out wood preserving

operations that included pressure treating with creosote, pentachlorophenol and water-soluble metal salt preservatives. Wastewater generated from the operations was discharged to on-site disposal ponds until 1971. The ponds were covered with sand and replaced by a new disposal pond that was used until 1980. After 1980, wastewater either was reused in the treating process or placed in evaporation tanks.

In 1984, St. Regis Paper Co. Superfund site was placed on the National Priorities List, a roster of the most contaminated sites in the United States. In 1985 St. Regis ceased operations at the facility and merged with Champion International.

Under orders from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency in 1986, Champion performed a series of activities to clean up the site, including soil excavation to an on-site vault and installing a ground-water treatment system.

An MPCA five-year review completed in 1995 found the cleanup activities performed during the late 1980s may not have been adequate and more investigation was needed to determine whether human health and the environment were protected. Because the site lies within the boundaries of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe reservation, EPA became the lead agency for the site in 1995. A second five-year review issued by EPA confirmed the MPCA opinion that additional study was needed.

International Paper Co. bought the site in 2000. Under Superfund law, IP is responsible for cleaning up pollution caused by the previous owners. EPA sampling at the site, which began in 2001, indicated a potential risk to nearby residents from dioxin in the soil. IP conducted additional sampling in August 2003 and confirmed the soil contamination on-site. EPA issued its December 2003 administrative order for soil removal based on those sampling results.

Information about the St. Regis Superfund site is available on the internet at:
www.epa.gov/region5/sites/stregis

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