

NATIONAL PRIORITIES LIST (NPL)

Proposed Site

April 2009

GOWANUS CANAL | Brooklyn, New York Kings County

Site Location:

The Gowanus Canal is a 100-foot wide canal extending about 1.8 miles from Butler Street to Gowanus Bay in Brooklyn, NY. The adjacent waterfront is primarily commercial and surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

Site History:

The Gowanus Canal was built in the 19th Century by dredging a tidal creek and wetlands to allow industrial access to Gowanus Bay. After completion in the 1860s, the canal became a busy industrial waterway, home to heavy industries including manufactured gas plants (MGP), coal yards, cement makers, tanneries, chemical plants, and oil refineries. It was also the repository of untreated industrial wastes, raw sewage and runoff.

Site Contamination/Contaminants:

The canal consists of contaminated sediments with no identified source(s) due to the complexity and overlap of potential sources. Sediments are contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (at levels up to 4.5% in the canal sediment), polychlorinated biphenyls, pesticides, metals, and volatile organic contaminants.

Potential Impacts on Surrounding Community/Environment:

The canal is part of the New York-New Jersey Estuary, which EPA has designated an Estuary of National Significance. Some people currently use the canal for canoeing and diving, while others catch canal fish for consumption. A public fishing area just downstream of the canal in Gowanus Bay is fished daily.

Response Activities (to date):

The Gowanus Flushing Tunnel was constructed in 1911 to bring water into the canal and reduce stagnation. It stopped operating in the 1960s, but was repaired and reactivated in April 1999. This allows oxygen levels to be brought up to levels to sustain aquatic life. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers collected sediment samples in 2003 and 2005, and has completed a restoration study.

Need for NPL Listing:

The state referred the site to EPA because the site was too complex for the state to deal with. No options for cleanup other than listing are viable.

[The description of the site (release) is based on information available at the time the site was evaluated with the HRS. The description may change as additional information is gathered on the sources and extent of contamination.]

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html> or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.