

Concrete Revetment Repair Work at Ambler Asbestos Superfund Site Questions and Answers

Q: Did EPA evaluate why the concrete revetment failed?

A: EPA evaluated the effectiveness of the cleanup and the need for routine maintenance and repair. Our evaluation determined that the cleanup continues to be protective of human health and the environment. This evaluation also determined that the revetment has not failed, but is in excellent condition. EPA did determine, however, that the stream bank is eroding around the concrete revetment and needs to be stabilized to preserve the integrity of the revetment. By making these repairs to the stream bank, EPA expects the revetment to stay in place for decades to come.

Q: Did this failure contribute to a significant release of asbestos and other toxins into the Wissahickon creek?

A: The erosion of the stream bank around the concrete revetment did not contribute to a release of asbestos or other toxins from the Ambler piles. Because the erosion is occurring upstream of the concrete revetment and along the lower edge of the revetment beyond the extent of the Ambler Asbestos piles, it is the native soils and sediments of the stream bank that were washed away by water of the Wissahickon.

Q: Is the placement of rocks a good remedy for the repair? Is a concrete revetment stronger than rocks? Has EPA studied this and can they provide documentation of science to back this repair up?

A: EPA is using an established technology to stabilize the stream bank, called riprap. Riprap is a universally accepted and recommended method in civil engineering for this type of erosion control. The work will include reinforcing the stream banks with large angular stone (riprap). The installation of properly sized rocks will rival the strength and stability of the concrete revetment.

For anyone interested in knowing more about the effectiveness of riprap, the following link provides a good, plain language fact sheet on riprap for stream erosion.
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/water/pubs/fs_st/stfs16/tabid/4171/Default.aspx

Q: Is 10 years considered a slow failure for a concrete revetment?

A: The revetment has been in place for 17 years, and is in excellent condition. The maintenance work will ensure that it continues to be effective for decades to come.

Q: EPA has continued to tell our CAG that the remedy for the White Mountains was a good remedy, is intact, and continues to be protective of human health, now it needs repair and asbestos has been detected in the creek near this failure. Can EPA explain this more?

A: EPA has certified in three consecutive Five Year Reviews that the remedy implemented at the Ambler Asbestos Piles Superfund Site is in good condition and continues to be protective of human health and the environment. EPA expected repairs would have to be made over time, and we planned for that in our Operation and Maintenance (O&M) program.

As a result of the long-term O&M activities and, as reported in the last Five Year Review, EPA became aware of erosion of the stream bank at the upstream edge and along the toe (down slope edge) of the concrete revetment. The consultant responsible for O&M on the Locust Street Pile began planning the maintenance activities for the revetment in 2007. EPA and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) approved the repair design in December 2008, and the maintenance is now being implemented in August 2010. The contractor for the work shared the plans and schedule with the Ambler Borough Manager, Wissahickon Valley Water Association, the Montgomery County Conservation District and PADEP.

EPA believes that the suspected asbestos containing materials (pipe and shingle fragments) have been carried down from other, upstream sources by the water flow in the Wissahickon. Similar materials are evident upstream of the Ambler Asbestos Site location.

Q: Will EPA hold a public meeting to tell the community about the repair work?

A: At this time, EPA does not plan to hold a public meeting about the Ambler Asbestos maintenance work. However, we are happy to respond to questions from the community. In addition, we can offer to update the community on the maintenance work at an upcoming CAG meeting, which are open to the public. Also, as part of our ongoing work at the BoRit Asbestos Site, EPA plans to host a series of open houses and public meeting opportunities and we would be happy to address any questions or concerns regarding the Ambler Asbestos Site during those meetings.