



# Wolverine World Wide Sites Community Involvement Plan - At a Glance

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prepared a Community Involvement Plan, or CIP, to inform, engage, support and respond to the community affected by Wolverine World Wide former operations in and around Rockford and Belmont, Mich. Our community involvement effort is committed to promoting effective and meaningful communication between the public and the Agency in order to ensure the community’s current concerns and information needs are considered in all response activities.

## What We Heard

To learn about concerns, questions and informational needs related to the Wolverine World Wide sites, we conducted interviews with 48 residents, local officials and other interested community members. Below is a brief summary of what community members said. More details on the community interviews can be found in the Comments and Concerns section on Page 24 of the full Community Involvement Plan, which can be found under “Documents” at [www.epa.gov/mi/wolverine-world-wide-tannery](http://www.epa.gov/mi/wolverine-world-wide-tannery).

## Knowledge and awareness

Many of the people we spoke with were very knowledgeable about the former tannery site and had an awareness of the site’s history. Most of the residents have lived in the neighborhood for over 20 years and some of their family members worked at the former tannery. Some of the people interviewed have had some level of involvement with a local neighborhood group formed in response to the Wolverine World



The former Wolverine World Wide tannery operations.

Wide sites, Concerned Citizens for Responsible Remediation, or CCRR. Those interviewees got information about site history and past activities through discussions with CCRR. Others became aware of the former tannery site when it was being demolished; many residents witnessed the buildings being demolished.

## Communication and informational needs

When we asked people where they get their information about the sites, the following were the most mentioned resources:

<p><b>Neighborhood Groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCRR</li> <li>• Neighbors for Neighborhoods</li> </ul>	<p><b>Newspapers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Rockford Squire</li> <li>• The Grand Rapids Press</li> <li>• The Advance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Local/State Agencies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EGLE</li> <li>• Kent County Health Department</li> <li>• City of Rockford</li> <li>• Algoma Township</li> <li>• Plainfield Township</li> </ul>
<p><b>Online</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MLive</li> <li>• Facebook</li> </ul>	<p><b>Local News Channels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Channel 8</li> <li>• Channel 13</li> </ul>	



EPA CIC Diane Russell (left) interviews a community member to learn her concerns about the Wolverine sites.

## Meetings

Most of the interviewees said they had attended previous public meetings for the site but felt they were not beneficial and did not provide concrete information.

## Trust

**Wolverine** – Most residents said they have a negative opinion of Wolverine World Wide and are disappointed in them for their past operations. They said they believe Wolverine knew their dumping practices were bad, that what was being dumped in the landfills could be harmful to the environment and the community and that they have missed several opportunities throughout the years to correct their mistakes. Some said they believe the company has been covering up their mistakes for years and do not want to admit to any wrongdoing. Overall, we heard people express the desire for better communication between Wolverine and the community. One individual said he does not associate the tannery site with the emerging PFAS contamination and wants to see hard facts that state otherwise.

**Government** – Based on information EPA heard in the interviews, we found evidence of a strong division between the community and local governments in the city of Rockford and Plainfield Township. Many residents interviewed said they do not trust the information that comes from their local officials and believe they give favoritism to Wolverine because Wolverine has such a strong impact on the local economy.

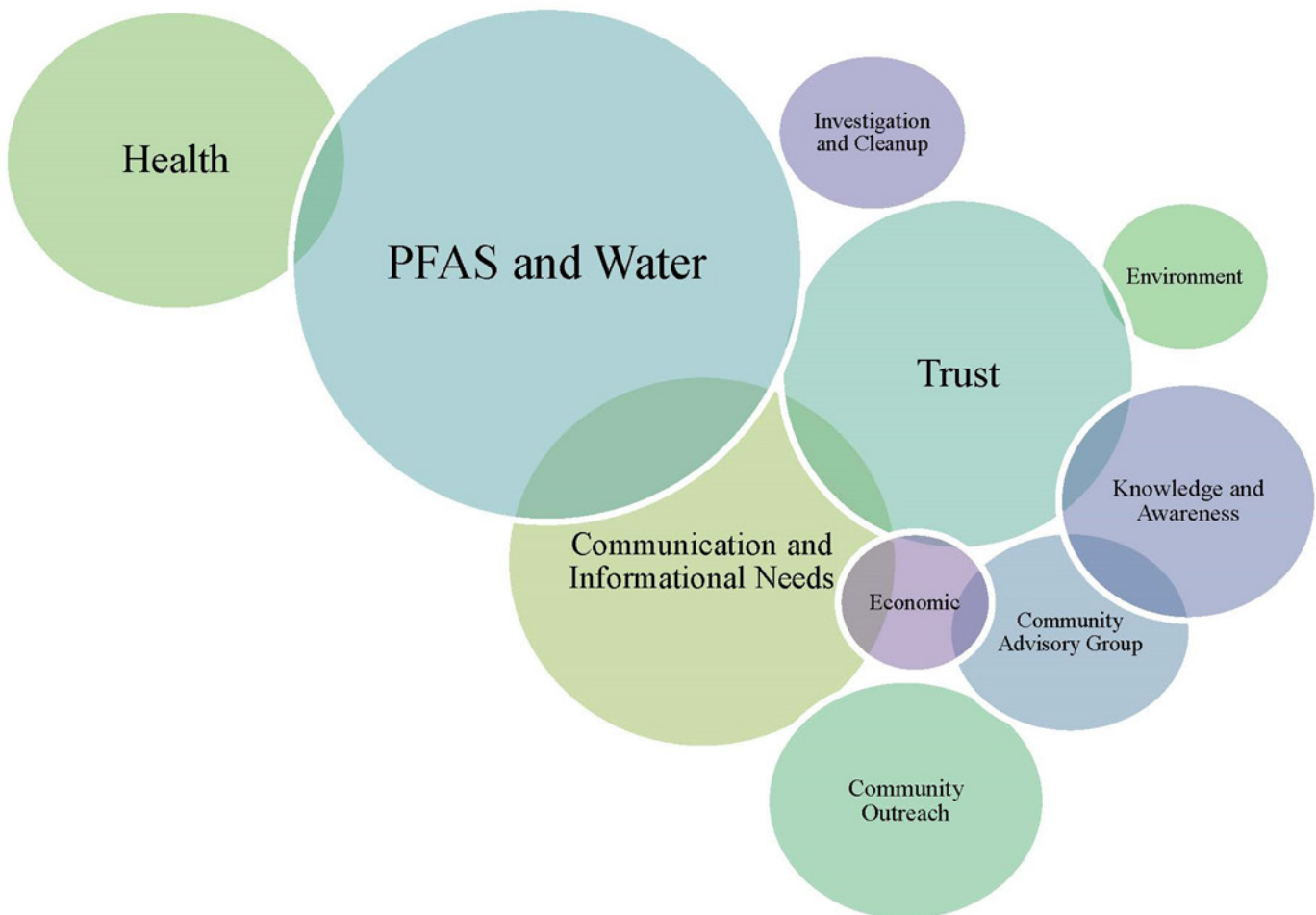
## Community Advisory Group

Most people said they felt a CAG would be beneficial to the community and some expressed interest in being a part of one.

## Concerns voiced

**PFAS and water** – Most residents interviewed voiced concerns about the quality of the drinking water and the emerging PFAS contamination. People said testing has shown that some wells have non-detectable levels and others at high levels. One person questioned why Plainfield Township moved its water supply from the Rogue River to a closed aquifer without informing the community. Many interviewees expressed desire to see the guidance level for PFAS lowered from the current standard of 70 parts per trillion, or ppt. Algoma Township residents said they had concerns about PFAS because they are not on any municipal water system.

**Health** - During the interviews, most interviewees expressed health concerns related to the sites. People talked about children that lived near the tannery that had died from nasal cancer, a woman that died of thyroid cancer, and people with other illnesses, including





autoimmune diseases. Many residents told us that they know of several people who are sick or have been sick. Some of the House Street residents we spoke with said they have high levels of PFAS in their blood and are worried about possible health risks associated with it. Most of the people that EPA spoke with had concerns about the way the buildings were demolished. One resident who had a career as a health and safety manager said that proper safety precautions were not being taken during demolition. He stated that there was no air monitoring or asbestos abatement being done and dust was going everywhere.

**Environment** - Some interviewees are worried about the effects of PFAS on the environment and crops. Many city of Rockford residents talked about the smells coming from the old tannery and how you could witness the smell throughout downtown Rockford. People talked about hide waste, waste from drums and leather scraps in the Rogue River. Residents voiced concerns about the landscape being left a mess after removal activities were completed at the House Street Disposal Area and that not all debris was removed. Many residents stated that during large rain events, you can see white foam on the river. A few community members asked if it was safe to hunt and fish in the area.

**Economic** - Some residents worry about how the Wolverine site and PFAS contamination will affect home sales and remodeling. The business owners we spoke with are concerned about how the PFAS issue will affect tourism and, business and home sales in the area. Some of the people we spoke with would like to see the former tannery site cleaned up and used for something to benefit the community.



Waste drums.

# Outreach Goals and Methods

an outline of community engagement goals and principles and the methods and timing identified to achieve them

**goal** **method** **timing**

**PROVIDE**  
INFORMATION TO THE COMMUNITY THROUGHOUT THE CLEANUP PROCESS

- Keep the community informed of ongoing and planned activities
- Explain what is being done and why in an understandable format
- Develop informational materials and messages based on community needs
- Be transparent by providing data, being forthright and detailed in communications and openly sharing decisions when possible

WEBSITE REPOSITORY	available
DEVELOP CIP	current
MAILING LIST	periodic
FACT SHEETS	as needed
INFORMATIONAL BROCHURES	
IN THE MOMENT VIDEOS	
NEWS RELEASES	
SHARE DATA IN REAL TIME, WHEN POSSIBLE	periodic

**INPUT**  
ACHIEVE EARLY AND FREQUENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR

- Encourage and enable residents to get involved
- Listen carefully to community concerns
- Respond to community concerns in a constructive, fair and respectful manner
- Change planned actions, where warranted, based on community input

SITE TOURS	periodic
EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS	as identified
PUBLIC MEETINGS	as needed
PARTICIPATE IN LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUP MEETINGS	as identified
PLAN OR PARTICIPATE IN LOCAL OUTREACH/COMMUNITY EVENTS	periodic
CAG MEETINGS	monthly
STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS BETWEEN EPA, EGLE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS	
SOLICIT COMMENTS DURING A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD	periodic
PREPARE AND ISSUE A RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY	

**IDENTIFY**  
AND SHARE RESOURCES FOR IMPACTED COMMUNITY TO HELP ACHIEVE ALL GOALS

- Help people understand complex environmental issues
- Ensure meaningful involvement in decision-making
- Provide tools to maximize understanding and participation

CAG FACILITATION	monthly
TECHNICAL RESOURCES	as identified
REDEVELOPMENT RESOURCES	as needed

*Note: A central box labeled 'PROVIDE & INPUT' with arrows indicates a cycle between the 'PROVIDE' and 'INPUT' sections. An image of a community meeting is also included in the lower right quadrant of the graphic.*

## Overview of the sites

The Wolverine World Wide sites consist of an inactive tannery located at the northern end of the downtown district of the city of Rockford, and a former waste dump known as the House Street Disposal Area on House Street in Plainfield Township. The inactive tannery is surrounded by commercial businesses to the south, residences to the east and north and the Rogue River and residences to the west. The recreational White Pine Trail runs through the western portion of the tannery property along the bank of the Rogue River. Rum Creek also runs through a portion of the tannery property. The House Street Disposal Area is in a location of mixed rural and residential land, with homes located directly across from the disposal area on House Street. A third area located north of 10 Mile Road in Algoma Township, known as the Wolven/Jewell area, is currently under investigation by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy to determine if PFAS concentrations in residential wells are associated with the former tannery. The city of Rockford supplies water to residents from three wells located on the southeast side of the city. Residents in Plainfield Township receive water from 11 wells in two separate well fields or are on private wells. Most residents in Algoma Township have private wells and a limited number receive water from Plainfield Township, the city of Rockford or the village of Sparta.

### Site history

The Wolverine tannery began as a shoe factory built by G.A. Krause and his sons in 1903. In 1908, Krause built the tanning operations facility on the south portion of the property to supply the factory with leather. Chromium was used to tan and color the leather hides. Waterproofing of leather began in the late 1950s,

which involved the use of Scotchgard™, a product which at that time contained high levels of some PFAS compounds.

The company constructed the wastewater treatment plant sometime between 1950 and 1960. In the 1960s, Wolverine disposed of byproducts from its leather tanning operations at the House Street Disposal Area, which was a licensed and regulated disposal facility authorized by the state of Michigan. Used exclusively by Wolverine, waste disposed of at the site included lime-sludge wastes from the treatment of tanning wastes, and lime slurry wastes, which were disposed of in trenches dug across the property. The property also contained seepage pits, which were used for disposing of lime liquor (mixture of lime, water, dissolved protein and fat) and other liquid wastes. Wolverine also stored and disposed of pesticides and fertilizers at the facility from 1952 until 1969. The license for the disposal area expired in 1978, but it appears that no waste was disposed of at the site after 1970. Wolverine ceased operations at the tannery site in 2009 and demolished all but one of the tannery structures between 2010 and 2011.

In 2012, EGLE and EPA conducted a preliminary assessment of the site. Soil and groundwater sampling found hazardous substances at the former tannery, the disposal area and surrounding residential properties.

Currently, EPA and EGLE are coordinating their investigations of contamination from the former tannery and disposal area. Contaminants include PFAS, heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, and semi-volatile organic compounds, or SVOCs. EGLE remains the lead agency investigating PFAS contamination in groundwater, surface water and drinking water.

## For more information

For questions, comments or for more information contact these EPA team members:

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### **Website:**

[www.epa.gov/mi/wolverine-world-wide-tannery](http://www.epa.gov/mi/wolverine-world-wide-tannery)