NPL Site Narrative for Oeser Co

OESER CO
Bellingham, Washington

Conditions at Proposal (December 1996): The Oeser Company site is a wood treating facility located in the northwestern portion of the City of Bellingham, Washington. The facility comprises approximately 23.5 acres and is surrounded by mixed residential and industrial properties. The terrain at the site is relatively flat, but south of the site the terrain drops steeply into a ravine drained by Little Squalicum Creek. The creek is fed by storm water discharges from several outfalls and by ground water and flows approximately 2,100 feet from the Oeser Company outfall into Bellingham Bay.

The Oeser Company has operated at the site since 1939 and prepares and treats wood poles for utility companies. Creosote [which contains semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs)] was used as the chemical treating agent until 1973. Pentachlorophenol (PCP) has been used on site since the 1960s in both pressure and thermal treatment.

An expanded site inspection (ESI) was conducted by Ecology and Environment, Inc., (E & E) in August/ September 1995 at the request of the EPA. Sampling and analysis identified five sources of contamination at the site: the PCP treatment system, the retort drip pad, the treated pole drying areas, gravel filtration beds, and contaminated soil. An observed release to air of several VOCs and SVOCs including PCP was established with ESI air samples collected August 30 and 31, 1996 and September 6, 7, and 8, 1996. Levels of 1-methyl-benzene, ethyl benzene, and naphthalene were above health based benchmarks. An observed release to Little Squalicum Creek of PCP and several other SVOCs was established with sediment and/or surface water samples.

Little Squalicum Creek is considered a fishery by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife; however, fish can no longer survive in the creek due to contamination present. Bellingham Bay and Puget Sound support large commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries. The peregrine falcon, the bald eagle, and numerous wetlands are also in the vicinity of the site.

EPA is considering various alternatives for the site.

Status (September 1997): An EPA Removal Assessment was conducted in January, February, and in April 1997. Significant levels of PCP and PAHs were detected in surface and subsurface soil, in shallow ground water, and in a deep aquifer. The assessment also revealed elevated levels of dioxins in surface soil. Inability to reach agreement on the scope of removal actions resulted in EPA issuing a Unilateral Administrative Order (UAO) to the Company to conduct the work EPA has determined necessary to abate immediate health threats. Work is expected to be underway by September, 1997.

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 ATSDR - ToxFAQs (http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.