

Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program - Erie Coke Site

Introduction

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program is conducting an environmental investigation at the Erie Coke Site (Site) located in the City of Erie, Erie County, Pennsylvania. The Site is located within a DEP-designated Environmental Justice Area. The investigation will determine the level and extent of contamination present on-site and risks to public health and the environment. This Fact Sheet summarizes the status of investigations and ongoing actions occurring at the Site.

Hazardous Site Cleanup Act (HSCA)

HSCA provides the legal authorization and funding for DEP to carry out a number of activities to address releases and threatened releases of hazardous substances to the environment. These activities include investigation, cleanup, and monitoring at contaminated sites. HSCA also provides DEP with enforcement authority to compel responsible persons to conduct cleanup actions. In addition, HSCA authorizes DEP to recover its costs from responsible persons.

Site Background

The 183-acre Site is located at 925 East Bay Drive in the City of Erie. An industrial manufacturing facility has operated at the Site since approximately 1833. The first known coke ovens began operating at the Site in 1925. Erie Coke Corporation (Erie Coke) began operations at the Site in 1987. The facility included 58 coke ovens, a coke oven battery under-firing system, two boilers, a byproduct tar recovery system, associated railroad lines, and a wastewater treatment system. Following a long history of violations of state and federal environmental laws, Erie Coke ceased operations in December 2019.

History of Investigation

In August 2018, approximately 600 gallons of wastewater were released from a finishing tank at Erie Coke's wastewater treatment plant onto the ground. In March 2019, a large above-ground tank at Erie Coke's wastewater treatment plant failed causing a large volume of wastewater to be released. Known hazardous substances within the wastewater included benzene, naphthalene, ammonia, and cyanide. In July 2019, DEP conducted a limited sampling event, collecting soil, surface water, and groundwater samples at various locations on the Site. DEP has documented the release and presence of hazardous substances in soils, surface water, and groundwater at the Site. It has determined that further investigation is necessary to identify any risks to public health and the environment.

Environmental Protective Agency (EPA) Emergency Removal Action

In September 2020, at DEP's request, EPA began a time-critical removal action to mitigate threats posed to the public health, welfare, and environment due to the threatened release of hazardous substances at the Site.

EPA demolished buildings, removed and disposed of waste, recycled scrap materials, and mitigated risks associated with the remaining tanks, containers, and piping which posed the greatest threats. The EPA's removal action was completed in November 2022. During that time, EPA did not investigate the contamination in surface water, soil, and sediment, or subsurface groundwater and soil. In the 3rd quarter 2024, EPA will collect soil samples from areas adjacent to the Site in an investigation named the East Avenue Study Area.

Environmental Site Investigation

DEP contracted with Michael Baker International to perform a comprehensive site investigation from September 2022 to March 2023. The Phase I Final Report was submitted and approved by DEP in July 2023. The Phase I investigation assessed the surface and subsurface soils, groundwater, surface water, and sediments at the Site.

Semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs) and metals were found extensively in soils across the Site. The SVOC contamination in the groundwater does not appear to be as extensive as that found in the soils. SVOCs and metals were also found in sediment samples collected along the Lake Erie shoreline. Benzene was the primary volatile organic compound (VOC) of concern in the groundwater. Benzene was found in the groundwater in multiple locations across the Site, and the extent of this contamination is not completely known at this time. A significant amount of man-made material, fill, or waste was deposited across the Site to build up the land. Additional site characterization is needed to determine the horizontal and vertical extent of the contaminants found in the soils and groundwater that were discovered during the Phase I Site Investigation. Between Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, DEP completed Phase II Site Investigation field activities.

Next Steps

The Phase II Site Investigation Final Report is tentatively scheduled to be finalized late Summer 2024.

Additional Site Information

For additional information or questions regarding the Erie Coke Site, please contact the Department's Site Project Manager, Chris Saber, at 814-332-6074 or csaber@pa.gov.

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For more information, visit www.dep.pa.gov.