



Minnesota
Pollution
Control
Agency

Metro District,
Site Remediation
Section

Former Despatch Laundry and Whiteway Cleaners Investigation

Geographic/Hennepin County/#27.01/November 2000

This Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) fact sheet describes an investigation of soil and ground-water pollution that begins this fall at a property in South Minneapolis. The MPCA wants local residents and businesses to have basic information about the investigation taking place not just on the site but in the surrounding neighborhood.

Where is the property that the MPCA is investigating?

The property is the former Despatch Laundry, also known as the former Whiteway Cleaners, located on the southwest corner of Stevens Avenue South and East 26th street in Minneapolis. All of the buildings on the site have been demolished. The property is under Hennepin County authority, since the former property owners forfeited it instead of paying taxes.

What is the history of the site and why does it need investigation?

From the early 1900s to approximately 1986, dry-cleaning services and a filling station operated on the property. The businesses used and stored chemicals that can pollute soil and ground water. In the past, people were not aware of risks posed to the environment by chemical spills and leaks.

Initial investigations show high levels of perchloroethylene (PCE), a type of drycleaning solvent, in the soil and ground water. In addition, petroleum and other solvent chemicals have contaminated the site.

According to records provided by city, county and state regulators, six underground storage tanks were removed from the property in 1993. Soil around the tanks was contaminated with petroleum chemicals. In 1998, the MPCA placed the property on the Minnesota Permanent List of Priorities – the state Superfund list. This made the site eligible for use of state dollars for investigation and clean-up activities.

Is there a risk to neighbors living or working near the properties?

Based on what we know so far, there is no likely risk to public health, since the chemicals in the soil and ground water are buried underground. However, part of the investigation is to determine the extent of the contamination and confirm MPCA's current assessment of the contamination.

People have to eat, drink, inhale, or touch the contamination in order to be harmed by it. The site is covered with gravel, so no one can touch or ingest the contaminants. The public drinking water supply is not taken from ground water in the area, so no one can become exposed through drinking polluted water. Inhalation exposure to PCE vapors that may have migrated through soil and building foundations is unlikely, particularly any distance from the site. The greatest potential health risk is to environmental contractors, who may wear protective clothing on the site.

However, the site does pose a risk to the environment. Ground water can become contaminated and can move. It can pollute rivers, lakes or streams, as well as production wells (business-specific wells).





Soil and ground-water contamination also prevents economic development in communities. Building new businesses or residential housing on contaminated property can be very expensive. Often, vacant lots people observe in their communities are “brownfield” sites like the Despatch/Whiteway property, which bring no value to neighborhoods in terms of new jobs, taxes or green space.

What chemicals have been detected at the property?

The chemicals found in sampling at the Despatch/Whiteway site fit into two general categories, both consistent with what MPCA knows about how the property was used in the past:

- Chlorinated solvents, including PCE, trichloroethylene (TCE), and 1,2-dichloroethene, which are hazardous substances and have adverse health effects if people are exposed to high doses over long periods of time. These likely came from drycleaning operations or equipment cleaning.
- Petroleum hydrocarbons, including benzene, toluene, xylene, and ethylbenzene. Spills and leaks of petroleum from gas pumps or underground storage tanks are common, and were even more so in the past.

How will the MPCA investigate the property?

The MPCA will sample soil on the property, as well as ground water both on the property and in the surrounding neighborhood. In order to do this, the agency will take soil borings (coring deep into the soil) on site and test for chemicals. During soil sampling, the workers may wear protective clothing; it is only when digging into the property that exposure can occur.

In addition, the MPCA will install ground-water monitoring wells on and off the property. These wells will be placed on the property and “downgradient” – downstream in the ground-water flow. Monitoring wells consist of pipes sticking out of the ground with sealed inner caps and locked outer covers. Some wells will be deep, others shallow. Samples from these wells will provide the MPCA with a picture of the ground water and some idea about how it is moving. After the wells are no longer needed, they will be sealed and covered.

Some of the wells will be installed in park or green space areas. The contamination does not pose a health risk for people making recreational use of these areas. These off-site wells help the MPCA track how far contaminants may have moved in the ground water. The MPCA will try to locate wells in public or open spaces where they do not interfere with the community or landowner activities.

Who pays for the investigation?

The state Superfund will provide dollars for investigation and, if necessary, cleanup. The Minnesota Superfund law investigates and cleans up releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants that pose a threat or potential threat to public health or the environment.

Superfund is a “polluter pays” law, and Superfund dollars are used only for sites where:

- There is an environmental emergency;
- The party responsible for the pollution is unknown;
- The party responsible for the pollution is not viable financially (bankrupt, out-of-business, etc.); or
- The responsible party refuses to investigate and clean up the site. (In this case, Superfund is used and then the MPCA tries to recover costs later.)

The Despatch/Whiteway site is tax-forfeit, which means that no one is viable. That is why the state is paying for the investigation.

When does the investigation begin, and when will results become available?

Well installation begins in the community in late November. The wells must be sampled during different times of year to give an accurate picture of ground water. Investigations take a long time, usually one to two years. However, the MPCA will update people who work or live in the community about any investigation results that might affect them. We appreciate the community’s assistance with this environmental investigation.

For more information:

Contact one of the MPCA project team: project manager Steve Schoff (651) 297-1790; hydrogeologist Hans Neve (651) 296-7715; or information officer Kathy Carlson (651) 297-1607.

MPCA Web site: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us>