

Saco Tannery Waste Pits Site

Saco, ME

U.S. EPA | HAZARDOUS WASTE PROGRAM AT EPA NEW ENGLAND



THE SUPERFUND PROGRAM protects human health and the environment by investigating and cleaning up often-abandoned hazardous waste sites and engaging communities throughout the process. Many of these sites are complex and need long-term cleanup actions. Those responsible for contamination are held liable for cleanup costs. EPA strives to return previously contaminated land and groundwater to productive use.

BACKGROUND:

The 212-acre Saco Tannery Waste Pits Superfund Site (the Site) is located off Flag Pond Road in Saco, Maine and surrounded by a rural residential area predominantly consisting of forested land and wetlands.

Prior to the mid-1950's the Site was primarily used as a homestead and a farm. In 1956, Saco Tannery, a leather tanning, company purchased the Site to dispose of its process wastes. For nearly two decades process wastes were transported to the Site from the off-site tannery for disposal. These wastes contained high concentrations of chromium, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs), including acid wastes from the tanning operations. These wastes were transported and disposed of on-site in two large lagoons (approximately two acres each in size) and 57 smaller disposal pits.

In 1981, Saco Tannery ceased operations and NKL Tanning purchased the Site. In 1983, NKL Tanning ceased operations and the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), a quasi-state agency, acquired the property. The Site was placed on the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) in September 1983.

CLEAN UP ACTIVITIES:

Phased investigations in the early 1980s conducted by MEDEP and EPA were followed by completion of the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) in 1987. The primary contaminants of concern resulting in an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment were arsenic, chromium, lead, manganese, chlorobenzene and bis (2-ethylhexyl) phthalate.

In 1982, EPA identified three acidic waste pits as posing immediate and significant human health risks. Between July and October 1983, EPA conducted a Removal Action by extracting the liquids, neutralizing the sludge, and capping the pits. A fence was also erected along Flag Pond Road.

KEY CONTACTS

DARRIEL SWATTS

U.S. EPA Community Involvement Coordinator
617-918-1065
swatts.darriel@epa.gov

TAYLOR CAIRNS

U.S. EPA Remedial Project Manager
617-918-1174
cairns.taylor@epa.gov

JOHN BRYANT

U.S. EPA Remedial Project Manager
617-918-1375
bryant.john@epa.gov

TESS SWIECANSKI

Maine DEP Project Manager
207-816-0112
tess.swiecanski@maine.gov

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SUPERFUND

In 1989, EPA selected a cleanup plan which was memorialized in a Record of Decision (ROD). The objectives of the cleanup plan were to eliminate existing and future risk to public health and the environment. The remedy selected included construction of soil cover systems over the remaining waste pits and lagoons, installation of a groundwater monitoring network, and implementation of a monitoring program for various media (e.g. groundwater, surface water and sediment). The selected remedy also requires EPA to conduct periodic Five Years Reviews (FYR) of the Site. The last FYR was completed in 2019 and can be viewed on the site page.

The soil cover system selected in the 1989 ROD was completed in 1993 and remains intact and is functioning as designed. The system consisted of covering the waste pits, lagoons and the contaminated sediments with geotextile fabric, followed by a rock and stone layer, till, topsoil and was then seeded. To assure that the soil covers would be protected and future development prohibited, the Site was converted into a permanent wildlife preserve pursuant to an act of the Maine State legislature.

CURRENT SITE STATUS:

Elements of the remedy have been implemented and the Site is now in the “Operation and Maintenance” (O&M) phase. During this phase, O&M of long-term remedy components is overseen by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MEDEP). This includes regularly inspecting the Site to ensure that the containment remedy continues to be effective, and routinely collecting environmental samples to ensure contaminants in groundwater have not migrated off-site.

EMERGING CONTAMINANTS:

In 2019 MEDEP included Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in a groundwater sampling event of on-site wells to address recent emerging contaminant concerns. In addition to sampling for PFAS the on-site groundwater monitoring wells were also sampled for the standard Saco Tannery contaminants of concern which included arsenic. Analytical results of the on-site sampling program indicated that PFAS compounds as well as arsenic concentrations were detected in groundwater beneath the Site. PFAS compounds are/were used in a variety of industrial applications dating back to the 1940's and can be associated with sites that have a history of waste dumping. (For more information about PFAS, please go to epa.gov/pfas)

In response to PFAS and arsenic detections in on-site groundwater monitoring wells, in August of 2019 and September of 2021 MEDEP sampled residential water supply wells in the vicinity of the Site. The analytical results indicated that concentrations of PFAS and arsenic were detected in off-site wells above levels considered to be safe for consumption.

WHAT TO EXPECT:






Based on the concentrations of PFAS and arsenic detected, EPA and MEDEP will be assessing the potential for off-site migration of PFAS and arsenic that may be emanating from the Site and the potential risk to local water supplies (e.g. private drinking water supply wells). Between the Spring and Fall of 2023 EPA plans to collect and analyze groundwater samples from wells within the vicinity of the Saco Tannery Waste Pits Superfund Site.

Saco Tannery Waste Pits Superfund Site

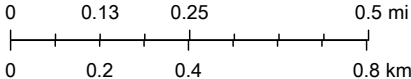


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February 23, 2023

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