Cleanup continues in St. Louis neighborhood

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Cleanup of contaminated soil in the residential area of St. Louis near the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site is continuing. Excavation was taking place last week at homes near the intersection of Watson and North streets. (Herald photos – Nelson)

by Greg Nelson
Herald Editor

The ongoing neighborhood remediation project in St. Louis is continuing.

Work at some homes in the contaminated area had to be postponed last fall.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sampled 134 yards in a nine square block section of the city near the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site and found 99 to be contaminated with elevated levels of DDT and PBB. However, only 52 were cleaned up last year.

The agency plans to remediate the remaining 47 properties this summer as part of Phase 3 of the cleanup.

Ten city properties, including alleyways and under streets, are also being cleaned up.

The area includes properties from M-46 on the south to the plant site on the north, and from Watson Street on the west to Mill Street on the east.

Additional work crews have been brought in, EPA Project Manager Tom Alcamo told members of the Pine River Superfund Citizens Task Force.

Some areas will take extensive excavation removing up to six feet of soil.

Sampling has been completed under Watson, Center and Bankson streets.

Drainage issues in the neighborhood will also be addressed this year.

Initially, excavation of about a dozen properties on Bankson, Center, Watson and Delaware streets were completed in 2013.

Those were the locations where orange snow fences had been placed several years ago to make the polluted sections of yards.

However, additional soil sampling and testing was conducted in the area and found the contamination was more widespread, which led to the most recent cleanup.

Some locations showed they contained 25 parts per million of DDT. Five ppm is considered enough for EPA cleanup standards.

The new study was done after more dead robins stated to be discovered in the area.

Because tests showed the birds were found to die from DDT poisoning the EPA was able to get funding for the work.

Thus far the EPA estimates it has removed more than 25,000 tons of contaminated soil from that area of town.

Also, 191 trees in the neighborhood were removed and replaced.

An additional 58 trees are scheduled to be cut down this year.

All of the trees that were planted in yards are alive, however, a number of trees in parkways have died and will be replaced.

Residents who have their yards remediated will receive a letter from the EPA after the work is compete stating that their property had been cleaned up to levels acceptable for use.

Some people living in the area were concerned about dust from the yard excavations and the work taking place at the former plant site and wondered if the air was being monitored.

However, EPA officials assured them it was, and water was also being used to keep the dust down.

The agency plans to remove another 18,000 tons of contaminated soil and conduct more soil sampling in the neighborhood to see if additional cleanup is required.

It has also announced that yard sampling will take place this year in the neighborhood south of M-46, and one block east of Watson Street.

At present, the west side of Pine Street seems to be the perimeter of high levels of DDT and PBB in yards in that area.