Treatment process at the Velsicol plant site begins

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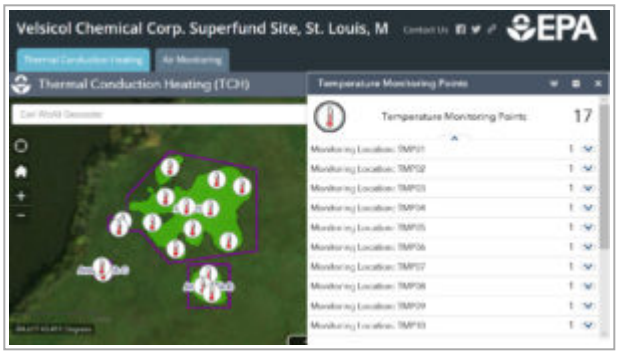

The creator of an EPA website tracking the “in place thermal treatment” process at the old Velsicol plant site in St. Louis described it as “mapping technology on steroids.”
Developer Brian Cooper utilized geographic information systems, the global positioning system and customized computer software tools to build the website.
He walked members of the Pine River Superfund Citizen Task Force through the different layers accessible at www.epa.gov/superfund/velsicol-chemical-michigan.
It will take time before all the details of the air monitoring and thermal data are electronically transmitted.
It will be weeks before the heating elements are working at full throttle.
The in-place, often called in-situ, process has been tried and tested at various EPA Superfund sites. The St. Louis project received $9.7 million to fund the clean-up of the 1-acre Area 1 section.
EPA and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality are partners in the project. It will be left up to MDEQ to maintain the site in perpetuity.
Area 1 is the first of several locations at the old plant site targeted for remediation.
EPA Project Manager Tom Alcamo estimated the final cost of the current project at $14 million.
Area 2 which has a larger area and greater volume of contaminants has an estimated cleanup cost of $20 million.
Community Involvement Coordinator Diane Russell is accepting names of persons interested in observing the equipment first hand.
Groups of 20 are being scheduled for site tours. Contact the EPA office in Flint at 989-395-3493 or russell.diane@epa.gov for information on scheduling.
Fifty-nine extraction wells collect contaminated groundwater and vapors for pumping to the above-ground treatment system where contaminants are destroyed and treated.
A 47,000-pound thermal oxidizer treats the vapor. Tanker trucks transport approximately 20,000 gallons of contaminated groundwater from the site each week and ship it off-site for treatment.
A groundwater pump and treatment system will eventually be in place.
Data is taken from seven ambient air monitoring stations positioned at different intervals from the cleanup activity. Data from each location will be added to the interactive map during treatment.
Full access to all the layers of the website depends on the speed of the Internet in use.
Besides the website, the task force looked back in history provided by Alma College Professor Ed Lorenz.

He showed five segments in a series developed by 9&10 News Reporter John McGowan entitled “PBB: A Look Back,” that was broadcast several years after the 1973 PBB crisis.

Featured was Dr. Alpha Clark, the Missaukee County veterinarian who was the first to suspect dairy cows he had observed had been poisoned.

Before long, Clark proved his suspicions by employing outside-the-state testing that led to the realization that animal feed at the Michigan Chemical St. Louis plant had been inadvertently mixed with the toxic fire retardant chemical laced with PBB. It was a health crisis that lingers today in the bodies of residents who digested dairy milk and/or meat laced with PBB.

Task force chairman Jim Hall was featured in a March 12, 2018, Detroit Free Press profile highlighting the possibility of men exposed to PBB can pass it on genetically to their offspring. Hall has blood levels of PBBs higher than normal. A daughter of the Halls passed away from a heart condition at age 2.