

ST. LOUIS

Website details history, cleanup of Velsicol site

By Linda Gittleman*For The Morning Sun*

Even more information than you may ever want to know about the ongoing St. Louis Velsicol Chemical plant site cleanup is now available online.

Since the address is a very long one, it's easier to just Google Velsicol Chemical St. Louis Michigan and the Superfund site will pop up.

From there you can follow the links set up by Environmental Protection Agency employee Brian Cooper.

Cooper was in St. Louis Wednesday for public informational meetings about the website and the clean up.

Maps indicating where all the air monitors are, where the treatments are taking place and explanations of how the thermal in-situ treatment works are all on the website.

The history of the plant site, the chemicals made there and helpful videos are all on line too. And, there's even a photo overlay of the site in 1975 that can be compared to what the land looks like now.

Still more information is coming.

Currently, a visitor can find out what, if any, gasses have escaped.

Since November, there has only been one incident and it was an escape measured in a very small amount above the limits.

EPA Project Manager Tom Alcamo said he believes it may well have been air pollution coming from outside the plant site - for example, a diesel truck.

That has been the only incident so far and since it was such a small amount, no one was at risk, Alcamo said

While a lab monitors the samples once a week, EPA employees are on site also monitoring with handheld devices. In a few days, real time monitoring will take place and that information will be

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online as well, Cooper said.

Actual soil clean up will begin when the ground gets hot enough — 212 degrees Fahrenheit.

And after that, it will take another 90 days to heat the soil, capture the vapors and like the water, treat them with carbon.

With the water, the very serious contamination of dense non-aqueous phase liquid (D-NAPL) is separated and removed. The water then goes through a rigorous cleaning method. Finally, after cooling, the water is released into the river.



LINDA GITTLEMAN — MORNING SUN

A sample jar of the cleaned water from the contaminated Velsicol Chemical plant site in St. Louis.

Theo Von Wallmenich, who has worked with the an employee of CH2M EPA on the site for sev-

eral years, showed a jar of the water ready to be released.

“It’s the cleanest water you’ve ever seen,” he said.

About 27,300 pounds of contamination are expected to be removed, he added. And as that happens, the number of pounds removed each day will also be on the website.

This first phase, called Area 1 of the 50 acre plant site, will end up costing about \$13 million, Alcamo said.

Once the clean up is finished - that’s expected about October or November- clean up of Area 2 can begin. About three acres make up Area 2.

Alcamo said he is cer-

tain that the EPA will pay for that clean up, but he doesn’t know how much money he will get or when it will begin.

Following that, an unnamed spot on the plant site, referred to as the southeast area, will be cleaned.

Alcamo said he expects that Area 2 will be cleaned in 2019/2020. And the southeast area will be cleaned in 2021/2022.

Still more cleanups - the burn pit for one - are anticipated.

Mayor Jim Kelly said he expected “a ton of questions the first week” from area residents. But that didn’t happen. Most people just want to make sure everything is safe, he said.