

EPA begins CTS soil, water sampling

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SKYLAND — Residents who live near the CTS Superfund site in South Asheville got a glimpse of hope toward cleanup of decades-old contamination seeping into their soil and groundwater.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Friday it will start sampling activities today for the Soil Vapor Extraction Confirmation Sampling and Analysis Plan and the Non-Aqueous Phase Liquids Investigation at the CTS Superfund site.

The work will include collecting soil and water samples to better understand how deep and wide the highest concentrated contamination exists on and adjacent to the former plant property, said Samantha Urquhart-Foster, EPA remedial project manager.

“The intent of the sampling is to find the most contaminated parts to the soil and groundwater to begin clean up,” Urquhart-Foster said. “The work plans were approved in December 2012, but we hadn’t begun work because we didn’t have approval for some of the properties. But we decided to go ahead and start sampling.”

“We were hoping it would start back at the beginning of the year, but we are glad that they are continuing with the sampling without stalling,” said Lee Ann Smith, chair of a community group called POWER (Protecting Our Water and Environmental Resources).

“We are celebrating this sampling event because it will bring us one step closer to the full-scale cleanup that we seek,” Smith said.

Urquhart-Foster said the sampling will begin on the site of the former CTS plant and move outward. CTS manufactured industrial switches and resistors at the Mills Gap Road plant from 1959-87. Chemicals used at the site, including the industrial solvent trichloroethylene, or TCE, have been found in high concentrations in the ground and in nearby drinking water wells.

Residents have been pushing for action on a cleanup for years. They have alleged numerous health problems, including cancer, were caused by the contamination. Some homes have since been connected to city water, while others have had filter systems installed.

Smith, a teacher at Glen Arden Elementary School, has lived less than a mile from the former CTS site for nearly 20 years. Both of her children, who spent their entire lives in that home, are cancer survivors.

The EPA announced in March 2012 the site had been added to the National Priorities List of Superfund sites.

The EPA sampling plan requires that samples also be collected on adjacent properties to the east of the site along Mills Gap Road, and, if data indicates the need, sampling may proceed to properties on the west. Specialized equipment will be used, and the sampling area may be expanded as data is collected.

Residents will see a trailer on site, as well as workers and a drill rig that will bore down into the soil and

collect samples, Urquhart-Foster said. The work will take place during daylight hours, most likely 10 days on, then four days off, she said, although that could change with weather or equipment issues. The sampling is expected to last for three months.

Actual cleanup of contaminated soil and groundwater is still years away, she said.

“We’ll have the sampling results a couple of weeks after the sampling is completed,” Urquhart-Foster said. “But it takes awhile to develop a cleanup plan. We’ll need to do more water sampling later to see how far the groundwater has been contaminated. It will take a couple more years after that to develop a cleanup plan.”

In July, residents living near the site won a legal victory when a panel of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled their lawsuit against CTS could move forward. The panel voted 2-1 to reverse a ruling handed down in U.S. District Court in Asheville that threw out the complaint seeking to force cleanup of extensive soil and groundwater contamination.

The lawsuit was filed in February 2011 seeking unspecified monetary damages and to force the company to remove contamination that seeped into the ground while the plant was in operation.

Earlier this week, CTS Corp. filed an appeal asking the U.S. Supreme Court to dismiss the lawsuit.