

EPA reaches agreement on Cyanamid site cleanup

Design work to begin; Wyeth to pay \$205M and oversight costs

By Bob Makin :: @ReporterBMakin

BRIDGEWATER — Cleanup of the American Cyanamid Superfund site has moved a step closer to reality with a recent agreement between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a subsidiary of Pfizer Corp. for preconstruction design work for the project.

On Sept. 27, the EPA issued its final plan to address contaminated soil, ground water and six waste disposal areas, known as impoundments 3, 4, 5, 13, 17 and 24. The agreement with Pfizer subsidiary Wyeth Holdings Corp. also requires the company to complete a study evaluating alternatives for cleaning up two additional chemical waste areas, called impoundments 1 and 2, which have been seeping cancer-causing benzene into the nearby Raritan River, Cuckhold's Brook and Middle Brook.

Wyeth also agreed to continue to operate a system for collecting and treating contaminated ground water underneath the site to prevent it from seeping into those waters. All cleanup work will be done under the EPA's oversight.

The soil, ground water and waste disposal areas or impoundments also are contaminated with volatile organic compounds and other hazardous materials. The extent and nature of potential health effects depend on many factors, including the level of contamination to

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which people are exposed and how long people may be exposed. The ground water underlying the site is highly contaminated with benzene. Many volatile organic compounds are known to cause cancer in animals and benzene can cause cancer in people.

"The Superfund program operates on the principle that polluters should pay for the cleanups," EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck said. "This agreement allows the cleanup of the American Cyanamid Superfund site to move forward without passing the costs to taxpayers."

The amount of benzene seeping into the Raritan and its tributaries has decreased in recent months, said Ross Stander, executive chairman of the EPA-founded CRISIS watchdog group.

CRISIS is studying the most recent river samplings and will have more to say in the near future, Stander said.

Watchdogs back plan

"The long-term remedial solution to impoundments 1 and 2 has been the subject of a Laboratory Feasibility Studies conducted by Pfizer's consultant during 2012 and are largely completed per Pfizer," Stander said. "The legal agreement

is aimed at allowing expanded pilot studies of the leading candidates for this difficult remediation within impoundment 2 during 2013. This is a critical step in determining if the leading candidate solutions can be scaled up. CRISIS believes that good caution is being taken to insure community safety during this pilot testing and will be following the process very closely."

CRISIS sought to impose a number of important conditions having to do with placement of contaminated materials and protection steps in event of flooding, Stander said. These were presented at the March 2012 EPA Public Meeting in Bridgewater, he said, and expanded in a subsequent formal response letter to EPA.

"The Record of Decision in September addressed several of our conditions," Stander said. "The others were deferred by EPA to the Remedial Design Phase. CRISIS will be monitoring the Remedial Design progress and will push to have our conditions met."

The cleanup of the American Cyanamid site will proceed once the design plans are completed and approved by the EPA, spokesman Elias Rodriguez said. The estimated cost of the cleanup is \$205 million. Wyeth also will reimburse all of the EPA's oversight costs. The design work is expected to take about two years.

The American Cyanamid Superfund Site has a history of industrial

pollution dating back to 1915. For nearly 100 years, prior owners used the location for manufacturing chemicals. A number of impoundments were constructed and used for waste storage and disposal throughout this time period, which eventually resulted in the contamination of soil and ground water. The site was placed on the federal Superfund list in 1983 after hazardous chemicals were found in the impoundments, soil and ground water.

To see the EPA's cleanup plan and the full history of the site, visit http://www.epa.gov/region2/superfund/npl/american_cyanamid.

Superfund is the federal cleanup program established by Congress in 1980 to investigate and clean up the country's most hazardous sites. The Superfund program operates on the principle that polluters should pay for the cleanups, rather than passing the costs to taxpayers. When sites are placed on the Superfund list, the EPA looks for parties responsible for the pollution and requires them to pay for the cleanups. In 2009, Pfizer assumed responsibility for the American Cyanamid site as part of its purchase of Wyeth, a prior owner.

For a copy of the consent order, visit http://www.epa.gov/region02/superfund/npl/american_cyanamid/docs.html.

Staff Writer Bob Makin:
732-565-7319;
bmakin@njpressmedia.com