

INDEPENDENT SINCE 1880

The Cornell Daily Sun

ONLINE

Published on *The Cornell Daily Sun* (<http://cornellsun.com>)

Gun Factory Clean-Up Site Raises Issues


By *Megan Carney*

Created Apr 30 2009 - 12:00am

The scene enclosed by the chain link and barbed wire fence surrounding the 2.1 acre property at 121-125 Lake Street represents your typical demolition site – save for a few transformers leaking dielectric fluid, federally-mandated aerosol lead monitors stationed around the perimeter and signs that read: “Danger: Asbestos, Cancer and Lung Disease Hazard. Authorized Personnel Only.”

Related:

- [City Denied Grant for Gun Factory](#) [1]
- [City of Ithaca Pledges to Overhaul Contaminated Gun Factory Site](#) [2]

 Print [3] E-Mail [4] Facebook [5] Digg [6]

More than two years after receiving a demolition order from the U.S. Department of Environmental Conservation, demolition of the 125 year old, condemned and dilapidated factory that formerly housed the Ithaca Gun Company is finally nearing completion. Although most long-term residents of Tompkins County are thrilled to see the neighborhood blight demolished — it had become a store-house for graffiti as a significant fire hazard — the demolition has raised concerns over the management of on-site toxins, the products of over 100 years of firearm production and testing.

Prior to a \$4.8 million remediation effort led by the Environmental Protection Agency between 2002 and 2004 with Superfund resources, these contaminants included lead levels as high as 215,000 parts per million (500 times the recommended level), as well as asbestos, arsenic, mercury and uranium, The Sun reported in 2007. However, the EPA's clean-up was incomplete, and subsequent soil testing revealed residual lead-contaminated areas, trichloroethylene contamination, as well as toluene levels at over 1000 times the recommended value.

Walter Hang, president of the Ithaca-based company Toxics Targeting, which specializes in mapping environmental hazards throughout New York State for potential property owners, believes that the current demolition and redevelopment plans do not adequately address the remaining high levels of contamination. He considers the project severely under-funded, under-planned and an overall deficient environmental remediation effort, in addition to posing a significant threat to public health. He has called the project, "a wholly inadequate cleanup."

One of Hang's main concerns is that the most heavily polluted area, which he cited as the west base of the "Island" — a projection of land overlooking Ithaca Falls — is not included in the current remediation plans. Of further concern is the fact that this piece of land has been designated as a handicap-accessible public park under the redevelopment plans. Many residents also swim and fish in the water at the base of the falls.

"After nine years, they've excluded the main polluted area, and the existing cleanup is the lowest allowable cleanup under law," Hang stated.

In a letter to Mayor Peterson dated Oct. 31, 2008, Hang advocated the adoption of more stringent remedial guidelines for the site.

"The proposed 'restricted residential use' clean up would only remove lead contamination in soil to 400 parts per million (ppm). We request all lead in soil be removed to the 63 ppm required for 'unrestricted use.' ... The Ithaca Falls natural area is frequented by young children and is proximate to Fall Creek Elementary and Ithaca High School. We believe maximum protection is warranted for Ithaca's children and the environment," Hang wrote.

Hang's letter received no response. The current demolition is progressing under the "restricted residential use" guidelines.

The City of Ithaca, along with site owner Wally Diehl, who also owns Fall Creek Redevelopment, LLC, Frost Travis, owner of Travis & Travis Development, LLC, and O'Brien and Gere Engineers, Inc., are working to finance the demolition and remedial efforts, and are planning to build at least 33 townhouse condominiums on site.

The condominiums would be for sale, "at the upper end of the market, given the cost to develop the site," said Travis, stating that construction should begin by early 2010 and near completion by 2011.



[7]

Toxic concerns: The demolition of the Ithaca Gun Factory and clean-up of the polluted site is raising concerns about nearby residents' health.

In response to Hang's criticisms of cost-cutting and sub-par environmental standards, Travis stated that he is relying on the guidelines set forth by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

"I'm not a scientist. I am relying on the guidelines from the DEC. The DEC's job is to protect the environment, not to make the developer's job easier. ... From a non-expert perspective, it seems they have a very rigorous safety protocol ... and soil clean-up standards," Travis said.

Travis believes that the lead levels the DEC is targeting under its current plan will be no different than those observed in many other areas in Fall Creek.

"The soil level of lead that the DEC is targeting is 400ppm. Many areas in Fall Creek have tested three times higher than that from leaded gas emissions and lead paint in homes," Travis explained. "I think that the DEC is proceeding with great care and exercising a lot of caution."

In an e-mail sent on April 28 to Mayor Peterson, Hang expressed his ongoing concern about water runoff from the demolition site and the current plans for burying contaminated debris in unmonitored pits on-site. He also advocated better control over dust emissions.

David Wilson, the site's safety and health coordinator and project health and safety officer, believes that ongoing efforts to curb dust are satisfactory.

"There are [air] monitoring systems that are on the perimeter of the site ... we also have handheld units," Wilson explained. "Two to three hoses are pouring water on [potentially contaminated] sites. The DEC is there almost every day. ... There's plenty of oversight taking place."

Mark Finkelstein, owner of State Street Associates, LLP and Gun Hill Residences, expressed little concern over dust nuisance.

"I have not noticed any significant problems. There is always water on the dust," Finkelstein stated.

Neither has Katie Walkley '10 noticed much dust. Walkley is a tenant of Gun Hill Residences, situated directly across the street from the demolition.

"I'm not too concerned about health stuff. It feels like they have done a pretty good job of containing everything. There's no dust blowing across the street."

However, Hang argues that college students often do not understand the severity of risk to public health that projects like the gun factory demolition can pose when mismanaged.

"Young people don't think about getting sick from toxic chemicals. They think about proximity and cost. [There is a] need for greater awareness for this generation and municipal authorities. You have to have an informed electorate," Hang said.

Sarah Steutesville, a member of the DEC-appointed Community Advisory Group on the site, admitted that the DEC acknowledged

few of the group's comments before beginning the demolition.

"The mayor and the DEC appointed us. Our job was to look at the demolition work plan and to give them our comments. We submitted 22 or 23 comments ... they accommodated under five. It's a very private sector thing where there's a lot of pressure for them to do it as cheaply as possible," Steutesville explained.

However, Steutesville feels that Travis is very approachable, and would love to see the initial disappointments turned into a positive plan for what has hitherto remained an inaccessible area.

"It's been decades since anyone has been able to be on this natural area site. This is Ithaca Falls, this is our namesake Falls ... and yet they've not been able to give it much attention."

Hang is not as easily abated.

"I'm going to criticize every incomplete remedial effort. I'm going to criticize the mayor, find people who have been exposed to contamination," he stated. "I'm going to shame and pound them in the press until I make them clean this site up. ... We have to address the existing [consequences] of what responsible parties have proposed."

[News Story](#) [Ithaca Gun Factory](#)

[Advertise with The Sun](#)

[Join The Sun](#) | [About CornellSun.com](#) | [About The Sun](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Posts and Comments are the exclusive property of their owners.

All other content © 2009 The Cornell Daily Sun

All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://cornellsun.com/section/news/content/2009/04/30/gun-factory-clean-site-raises-issues>

Links:

[1] <http://cornellsun.com/node/19551>

[2] <http://cornellsun.com/section/news/content/2008/07/30/city-ithaca-pledges-overhaul-contaminated-gun-factory-site>

[3] <http://cornellsun.com/print/37367>

[4] <http://cornellsun.com/send/send/37367>

[5] <http://www.facebook.com/share.php?u=http://cornellsun.com/section/news/content/2009/04/30/gun-factory-clean-site-raises-issues>

[6] <http://digg.com/submit?phase=2&url=&title=&bodytext=&topic=>

[7] <http://cornellsun.com/content/images/toxic-concerns>