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Toxic waste an even bigger problem in Horseheads, expert testifies

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Toxic waste lies underneath much of Horseheads, Elmira Heights and the Newtown Creek watershed and allows vapors to enter homes, Walter Hang of Toxics Targeting in Ithaca said Thursday.

Hang notified the Horseheads Village Board about the estimated 7,680-acre area in an e-mail he sent Thursday.

Hang included U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Superfund records as well as state Department of Environmental Conservation reports.

The polluted area is known to the EPA as the Kentucky Avenue Wellfield, named for an Elmira Water Board well at Kentucky Avenue in Elmira Heights.

That well was closed in 1980 after the soil underneath was found to be contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE).

The EPA record states the well was added back to the public water supply after water treatment facilities were constructed in 1997. The same record says the Elmira Water Board doesn't use that pump to supply residents.

The EPA began investigating whether homes might be affected by vapors coming from the soil in February 2007, according to the agency's records.

Hang said EPA officials told him they have inspected about a dozen homes, with homeowner permission.

"It is my understanding that access was denied by most homeowners," Hang said in his e-mail to the village.

EPA records state that two homes needed modifications to deal with toxic vapors.

In September, Hang notified the Horseheads Central School District about contamination under the high school athletic fields.

He got his information from EPA and DEC reports for a Superfund site called Kentucky Avenue Wellfield Satellite No. 18 by the EPA.

The coordinates listed in the reports are by the outfield fence, and the DEC report said the site was on the southwest portion of the athletic fields.

However, a consultant hired by the school district to investigate the issue said the site was actually farther west, at the bus fueling station.

Scott Nostrand, chief of the environmental division of Barton and Loguidice, a Syracuse-based civil engineering firm, told the school board at a meeting Thursday night that he looked at a 1986 EPA soil and sediment study of the site to make that determination.

"This was back in 1986," Nostrand said. "They didn't have geographic information systems and global positioning systems coordinate locators," Nostrand said.

Nostrand used aerial photography from 1955 to 1995 and data from the 1986 EPA study to determine the site's location.

His firm collected soil samples from the athletic fields Thursday and said test results would be given to the district in about a week.

During the meeting, Hang told this newspaper that the proximity of that site and another site on Thorne Street, called Satellite No. 8, are still causes for concern.

"When you have that uncovered waste material, it blows away. ... This is a classic model for how the pollution migrates.

"It's in ground water that's moving southeast. Well, if it moves southeast from that site, it's going to wind up on the athletic field."
