

Welcome to The Ithaca Journal - Ithaca, NY

Customer Service: [Subscribe Now](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [Contact Us](#) |

[theithacajournal.com](#) [Weather](#) [Jobs](#) [Cars](#) [Real Estate](#) [Apartments](#) [Shopping](#) [Classified](#)



Search Ithaca:

- ▶ Home
- ▶ News
- Local News
- Local Sports
- H. S. Sports
- Baseball - Softball
- Calendar
- Opinion
- Obituaries
- Life
- Forums
- Photo Galleries
- Videos
- Celebrations
- Weather
- Travel
- Nation/World
- Technology
- Archives
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Communities
- ▶ RSS Feeds [XML](#)
- ▶ Customer Service



▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼



The one-stop shop for wine in town and online. Our customer service is amazing and our wine. Become a member of our **Sybarite Club** and receive **incredible discounts** on your wine purchases.

Ithaca Shopping Plaza 607-273-7500 9am-9pm Mon.-Sat. north

More on-site cleanup in offing at Emerson

DEC talking with firm about possible contamination from storage drum

By Raymond Drumsta
Journal Staff

ITHACA — The state Department of Environmental Conservation and Emerson Power Transmission are discussing plans to clean up several sites of possible contamination rediscovered recently on plant grounds, DEC spokeswoman Maureen Wren said Wednesday.

Some of the 21 sites were used to store drums and are identified as “areas of concern” in a 2005 on-site assessment report by WSP Environmental Strategies. The sites are in addition to the trichloroethylene-contaminated fire reservoir site on the plant grounds, which is being cleaned up.

File down

- [Letter fr](#)
- [Sites of](#)
- [Map 1 o](#)
- [Transmissi](#)
- [Maps 2](#)
- [Transmissi](#)

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼



Sam Peter
Furniture & Bedding

LOWEST PRICES all the time

sampeter.com

Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting Ithaca, said he recently discovered the report in the Tompkins County Public Library and sent a letter about it to DEC Commissioner Alexander Grannis.

“I just stumbled on this report, which has never been publicly disclosed, as far as I know,” Hang said.

According to the report, the drums were still on the sites in 1971 and may have been the source of oil contamination identified by the Tompkins County Health Department at the time. From 1980 to 2004, Borg-Warner and Emerson Power Transmission removed drums and drum remnants from the sites, the report adds.

“Some of the drums were reportedly partially filled and releases could have occurred,” the report says. “Therefore, areas not previously investigated are considered a potential concern.”

The two largest former drum areas may have held as many as 60 and 150 drums each, according to a map in the report. Marked in yellow on the map, the areas lie on the west side of the plant property and about 40 yards southeast of West Spencer Street.

Formerly known as Environmental Strategies Consulting, WSP Environmental Strategies is an environmental consulting firm hired by Emerson Power Transmission. The firm prepared a work plan, dated October 2006, for clean-up of the areas of concern. The plan identified four additional areas of concern.

On Wednesday, Wren e-mailed the DEC's response to Hang's letter.

"Based on the December 2005 report, DEC requested Emerson submit a work plan for further remedial investigation in these areas of concern," Wren said in the e-mail. "While a work plan was submitted by Emerson, and DEC provided comments, the state has not approved it."

The DEC and Emerson need further discussions on the scope of work to be conducted at the plant property, Wren said, "to ensure that the investigation that will take place is sufficient to ensure protection of public health and the environment."

"The DEC's approach to the Emerson site has been to prioritize the investigation, clean up and mitigation of the areas of the site based on the data available," she said, "including the 21 sites referenced in the 2005 report, so as to reduce the potential for human and environmental impacts."

About three years ago, Emerson Power Transmission stepped up its investigation into past chemical use at its plant when it became clear the mitigation system for a TCE-contaminated fire water reservoir was not operating effectively. The contamination occurred under the ownership of Morse Chain, which previously owned the site.

The chain manufacturing company used a number of solvents in addition to the likely carcinogen TCE in its operations. TCE and other chemicals have since shown up in the indoor air of homes downhill from the site and in the soil beneath homes.

Hang said the former drum areas are the chief threat to nearby residents, since the drums may have held oil — and TCE contamination — like the oil in the fire reservoir.

"The reservoir, as it turns out, is only one of 25 areas of concern," Hang said. "If you look at the map, they're huge areas. According to their data, hundreds of drums were removed."

The drums may have held TCE-contaminated cutting oil or lube oil, Hang said. The oil contamination found in 1971 was not identified as TCE, he added.

"In 1971, they wouldn't have known TCE was an issue," he said. But, he added, drums and drum remnants like those found at the plant are "classic indicators of a contamination problem."

"When I saw this report, I saw that the drums had been removed," Hang said. "But contamination may have leaked out of them."

According to Hang, dozens of current and former residents living near the plant have spoken to him about contamination. Over the years, the residents attested to oil traces on Wood and Spencer streets, and rainbow marks in the

earth on the hillside below the plant, Hang said.

"People saw oil coming out of the ground," Hang said, adding that he has seen oil in a ditch near the plant.

"The government knew about the drums but never required a clean-up," Hang said, adding that he discovered the report in the Tompkins County Public Library while doing research on the plant.

Hang expressed faith in Grannis and the DEC to resolve the problem.

"He really believes in the mission of the agency to protect the environment," Hang said. "I believe he will review this information in a meaningful way. You can't just focus on the fire reservoir and ignore these other sources."

rdrumsta@ithacajournal.com

Originally published April 26, 2007

STORYCHAT 

 [Post a Comment](#)  [View All Comments](#)

LO,

You demand proof that something is dangerous to humans before attempts to remediate are mounted?

In cases where there may be a risk to human life one shouldn't demand absolute proof, simply having a reasonable belief that there is danger should be sufficient.

Let me guess, you don't live downstream of the site, do you?

Posted: Thu Apr 26, 2007 11:17 am

Dear Mr. Drumsta,

I read your report on the further decontamination of the Emerson site and elsewhere.

It was somewhat confusing. But reading through what appears to be the 'hype', I came to some rather obvious conclusions.

I wonder if you or Mr. Hang would Post the actual report title and where it can be found in the library.

As for the carcinogenicity of trichloroethylene, there have been no studies that have linked it to cancer in humans with the possible exception of people who had been continuously exposed as part of their job.

There are few actual animal studies to support the idea that it IS beyond doubt a human carcinogen in the amounts presumably found at Emerson and elsewhere.

It was used as a solvent for spilled oil, but it was also used as a solvent in DRY CLEANING until it was banned.

I've seen no support for the idea that people working in the dry-cleaning business have had a higher incidence of cancer. And certainly not in those wearing dry cleaned clothes.

The following paragraph highlights the agitprop surrounding