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Emerson paying for homeowner's gas remediation

JENNIE DALEY

Journal Staff

ITHACA -- A vapor mitigation system expected to reduce indoor levels of potentially toxic gases is being installed in at least one Ithaca house at Emerson Power Transmission's expense.

Janet Snoyer, who has lived on South Hill Terrace for 20 years, had engineers in her home Tuesday preparing to install the system.

"They spent quite a lot of time in the basement. They said they'd get it done in January for sure," she said.

Emerson chose her home because of the uncharacteristically high levels of trichloroethene, or TCE, found in her basement, according to Snoyer. TCE is a chemical degreaser used by the former Morse Chain factory, where Emerson now operates, that can be toxic if large amounts are inhaled. Other residences in her neighborhood may also be getting mitigation systems.

While Snoyer's neighbor's results showed 2.3 micrograms per cubic meter, her own cellar reading was 5.8 micrograms per cubic meter -- 0.8 micrograms above the state Department of Health's actionable guideline. Other reported results averaged less than 1.9 micrograms per cubic meter.

Snoyer said Derek Chase, an Emerson representative, told her that her house did not "match the pattern in my neighborhood."



KATE SCHLEE/Journal Staff

Janet Snoyer, pictured recently in the basement of her South Hill Terrace home, will get a gas remediation system installed in her home, courtesy of Emerson Power Transmission.



Next door, at the house with a lower reading, there is a new cement floor in the cellar, providing the needed barrier between potentially contaminated soils and air in the home. In Snoyer's 1874 home, the floor is dirt in some places, broken cement in others.

Emerson's offer included a new floor and a vapor mitigation system, intended to capture soil vapors before they enter the house. Installation requires installing a pipe underneath a solid floor with a fan at one end of the pipe. The fan draws gases into the pipe, which are then released outside the home.

Snoyer said she understood the cost of a system and installation is usually around \$2,500, but expected conditions in her home would cause the cost to rise.

The presence of TCE can be cause for concern because of its adverse effects on the central nervous system, inducing dizziness, headaches, nausea and fatigue, if high levels of the substance are inhaled.

A man-made solvent, TCE was used by the former Morse Chain factory to degrease chains. Emerson bought the plant in 1983, and TCE has not been used there since.

Four years after the factory traded hands, tests showed that TCE had leaked into soil and groundwater from an underground fire water reservoir on the property. Emerson set up a "pump-and-treat" remedial system, with DEC approval, in the 1990s.

Recently 42 homes downhill from the plant underwent a new round of testing. Only a fraction of the homes have received results. A second round of testing is scheduled for February or March.

Snoyer said she was told by Chase that they would not need to wait for the second round of tests before installing her remediation system.

There are reports she is not the only one who won't have to wait. Talk at a meeting Monday night hosted by State Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, D-125th, suggested that one or two other tested homes are also receiving systems.

David Baldrige, a spokesperson for Emerson, would neither confirm nor deny reports of other systems being installed.

"We don't comment on other peoples' test results," he said.

As for Snoyer's system, Baldrige said the offer was made based on review of the sampling results in Snoyer's home and site-specific conditions.

Neighbors are closely watching this process, to gauge Emerson's response and the extent of required remediation.

"I applaud Emerson for going forward with remediation," Timothy Weber, a resident active in monitoring the testing, said via e-mail. "This is unknown territory for all of us, and it's brave of Janet to be willing to go first."

Rick Grossman, who lives outside the area tested, was also pleased with

Emerson's response, though he said he hopes it's only the beginning of a larger endeavor.

"I think it's a nice gesture. Let's do the homes first. But I want to make sure we keep an eye on the larger area," Grossman said.

Once results for all 42 tested homes are available, Emerson and representatives from the state Department of Health and the state Department of Environmental Conservation will meet to discuss their analysis of the findings. The meeting is expected to take place next month.

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