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Edward Jones
Member SIPC

Local News - Friday, January 21, 2005

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More S. Hill homes to be tested

JENNIE DALEY
Journal Staff

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ITHACA -- Seven more homes downhill from the former Morse Chain plant will be included in testing for airborne chemicals, according to a spokesperson for Emerson Power Transmission.

Spokesperson David Baldrige said the test area was expanded after analyzing results from 42 homes that were tested in late 2004. He declined to give further details.

The tests look for toxins in and around homes potentially related to activities, including improper dumping, at the former Morse Chain plant, where Emerson plant now operates.

Of most notable concern is the possible presence of trichloroethene, or TCE, which was used to degrease chain produced by Morse Chain. TCE can negatively impact neurological functions if large quantities are inhaled.

Emerson bought the plant in 1983 and reportedly TCE has not been used there since.

"It's encouraging," Ken Deschere, whose home is one of the seven, said of the expansion. "I think getting the house tested is in my best interest. Even if we get a negative effect, we owe it to our neighbors to let them know what's there."

Deschere is particularly curious about levels of chemicals in his home because in October of 2003 he was diagnosed with a rare throat cancer. While he is quick to say that it is very hard to point out a cause and effect, the many hours he spent working in his basement, where toxin levels are often higher, and the five years he spent working at the Emerson plant when it was owned by BorgWarner, have piqued his curiosity as to what he's been breathing in his home.

Baldrige said Emerson's testing will begin as soon as access agreements allowing contractors to enter homes are received from residents.

The first round of testing for the seven likely will coincide with the second round of testing, scheduled for late January or early February, for the homes that already have one set of results.

That number of homes already tested resulted from an earlier expansion

Why it matters

This is the second expansion of the TCE test area, which has jumped from 35 to 49 homes, indicating the potentially contaminated area is larger than initially expected.

- About TCE: Trichloroethene, or TCE, which was used to degrease chain produced by the former Morse Chain, where Emerson plant operates now, can negatively impact neurological functions if large quantities are inhaled. Reportedly, TCE had leaked into soil and groundwater from an underground fire water reservoir on the former Morse Chain property.
- What's next: The next tests will be done in late January or early February. Residents also hope to have a meeting outlining the DEC's analysis of the first round of test results by the end of this month, although no date is set.

- On the Net: <http://6sys.no-ip.info/~tjweber/ship/>

On the Net

- To read previous stories on the Morse Chain spill, visit: www.theithacajournal.com/toxic

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of the testing area. Originally, Emerson proposed testing 35 homes downhill from the plant, which sits off Route 96B, just west of Ithaca College. That number then was bumped up to 42 after an August meeting of interested parties where there was "a lot of squawking," according to Deschere.

All of those homes have received results from their first round of tests and some have been offered vapor mitigation systems due to the level of chemicals in their homes.

Those who have test results are now waiting for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to analyze them as a whole and hold a meeting explaining their interpretations of the data. The meeting was expected to be held in January, though no date has been set.

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