

Health Information for Hazardous Waste Sites

Ashland/Northern States Power Lakefront Site

City of Ashland, Wisconsin

Update – November 2008

The August 2007 Remedial Investigation (RI) report, conducted by Northern States Power Wisconsin (NSPW), reaffirms that there are significant manufactured gas plant (MGP)-related contaminants at the site. The Human Health Risk Assessment portion of the RI report also verifies the findings of past investigations and assessments that contamination in certain areas of the site poses a health concern. The full RI report and additional information are available at the U.S. EPA website on the Ashland/NSP Lakefront Site: www.epa.gov/region5/sites/ashland/.

Health Concerns Summary: Findings of the RI report supports continuing practices and actions to protect the public from unsafe exposures to site-related contamination. People should not swim, wade, or boat in restricted areas of Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior at the site because they can come in contact with tar or oily slicks on the water, which may cause skin or eye irritation. People should notify agencies if they notice oily slicks on water or tar odors at the site. Sport fish from the site do not contain harmful levels of site-related contamination, but recent testing of some rainbow smelt found unacceptable contaminant levels. Agencies plan to retest smelt during Spring 2009. People should continue to follow the general Lake Superior fish consumption advice (available from the Ashland County Health Department). The public can safely use the nearby beach and boat ramp in Kreher Park.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) continues to assess this site's present and future threats to public health. This fact sheet summarizes DPH's conclusions and recommendations to protect public health, which are based on investigations by the Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Northern States Power Wisconsin. (Recommendations by DPH appear in italics)



The Ashland/Northern States Power site is 12 acres covering several properties within the City of Ashland, and about 10 acres of sediment and surface water of Chequamegon Bay.

PROBLEM SUMMARY

MGP Waste Contains Hazardous Chemicals

The site is contaminated by chemicals associated with MGP wastes, which typically includes solid waste and a complex mixture of chemicals. The most harmful chemicals are in classes called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Certain PAHs and VOCs increase a person's risk of cancer if they have regular contact with high levels over a long time (like in a work setting). When sensitive people are exposed to PAHs, even over short periods of time, they report skin irritation, eye irritation, headaches, dizziness and nausea. None of these MGP chemicals are likely to build up in tissue or the food chain by being passed from one animal to another.

When MGP wastes are buried, people are not exposed and the chemicals may remain unchanged for decades. However, as the wastes are disturbed, some of the

chemicals can dissolve in water or disperse into air, where

people can become exposed.

CURRENT SITE CONDITIONS

While sub-surface soils and groundwater at portions of the upper bluff and Kreher Park are contaminated by PAHs and VOCs, these areas are safe for use because where contamination exists in deeper soils, clean surface soils provide a good barrier. People do not use groundwater from the area of Kreher Park as their primary source of drinking water. Ashland residents have a municipal water supply that provides safe drinking water and comes from much further out in Chequamegon Bay. The two artesian wells in Kreher Park have also provided clean and safe drinking water, but are located very close to contaminants and were closed as a precautionary measure.

The bay adjacent to Kreher Park has 10 acres of contaminated sediments that can release oily slicks as a result of human activities or natural causes, such as high waves. Warning buoys and signs are placed around the area of affected sediments.

HEALTH CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People might come in contact with MGP waste, contaminated water, and oily slicks as they swim, wade, fish, or moor their boat (in the restricted zone) at Kreher Park.

People should avoid swimming, wading, and boating in the restricted zone. Pets should also be prevented from swimming or wading in this area. Prop wash or boat anchors can disturb the waste, sending oily slicks to the surface of the water. Contact with oily slicks may cause eye or skin irritation. Contact may also cause the skin to become more sensitive to light and other sources of UV, a condition called photosensitivity. Photosensitivity can result in an increased risk of sunburn. If people get the oily substance on their skin, they should wash the skin right away with soap and water. If their eyes are affected, they should flush their eyes with water. The selected cleanup should eliminate human exposure to chemicals in sediments and surface water.

MGP waste chemicals evaporate when exposed to air and many can have strong odors. When sensitive people inhale MGP waste chemicals, they report headaches, dizziness and nausea. Contractors will carefully control odors during cleanup activities.

Several residents recently reported odors in Kreher Park that may be coming from contaminated sediments. Some people have also observed and photographed tar slicks on surface water at the site. *The public should notify agencies about any odors or slicks they notice at the site.* Agencies want to better understand the frequency of and chemicals in the air associated with these coal tar slicks and odors at the Ashland/NSP Lakefront. *If you notice a tar slick on the water or odor in the air please immediately contact Chris Saari at the DNR 715-685-2920 or the Ashland County Health Department at 715-682-7004. Staff are ready to collect air and water samples for testing.*

Sport fish from the site have been tested and are safe to eat. However, some rainbow smelt from the site were found to have high levels of PAHs. This past spring, agencies did not find smelt at the site because runoff clouded the Bay's water and the fish spawned elsewhere. In 2009, agencies will again attempt to collect smelt samples in and around the site to better understand contaminant levels in these fish.

People should continue to follow fish consumption advice for Lake Superior and avoid smelt fishing in the contaminated area. Recommendations are found in the booklet, "Important Health Information for People Eating Fish from Wisconsin Waters" which is available from the Ashland County Health Department.

FUTURE PUBLIC HEALTH ACTIVITIES

The Ashland County Health Department and the Wisconsin Division of Public Health will continue to work on health related issues at this site. We will review sampling information, talk to concerned residents, meet with other agencies and make recommendations. We are available to discuss your health concerns.

RESOURCES

If you think you may be sick from site chemicals, contact your doctor. Explain your situation and how you may have been exposed. Doctors are welcome to contact either the Ashland County or State Health Departments for more information about this site.

CONTACTS

Ashland County Health Department

Terri Kramolis, (715) 682-7028

tkramolis@hsd.co.ashland.wi.us

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Henry Nehls-Lowe, (608) 266-3479

henry.nehls-low@wisconsin.gov

DNR Northern Region

Jamie Dunn, (715) 635-4049

james.dunn@wisconsin.gov

U.S. EPA, Region 5

Scott Hansen, (312) 886-1999

hansen.scott@epa.gov

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Official documents and records for this site can be found at the:

Vaughn Public Library

502 W. Main Street Ashland, WI 54806

For hours call: (715) 682-7060

Bad River Public Tribal Library

100 Maple St., Odanah, WI, 54861

For hours call: (715) 682-7111 ext. 1532

Red Cliff Environmental Protection Office

88395 Pike Rd., Hwy 13, Bayfield, WI, 54814

For hours call: 715-779-3650

WEB SITES

DNR – www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr/cleanup/ashland.html

EPA - www.epa.gov/region5/sites/ashland/

DHS – www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/eh/wisites/

Prepared by
Wisconsin Department of Health Services
and funded in part by the
U.S. Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry
PPH-7144 (Rev. 11/2008)