NPL Site Narrative for Peter Cooper

PETER COOPER
Gowanda, New York

Conditions at Proposal (September 1997): The Peter Cooper site consists of an inactive waste disposal area and some areas of contaminated soil at the former Peter Cooper Corporations (PCC) plant in Gowanda, Cattaraugus County, New York. Surroundings include Cattaraugus Creek to the north-northeast and an associated wetland to the west, residences to the southwest and south, and the remainder of the former PCC plant to the east-southeast. The western portion of the waste disposal area is on property owned by New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG), and the eastern portion is on property previously owned by PCC. The current owner is JimCar Development Inc.

PCC and its predecessor manufactured animal glue in Gowanda from 1904 until 1972, and industrial adhesives from 1972 until the plant closed in 1985. Between 1925 and October 1970, PCC used the northwest portion of the property to pile sludges remaining after the manufacturing process. The waste has been shown to contain elevated levels of chromium, arsenic, zinc, and some organic compounds. Samples of landfill waste collected in 1988 during a Remedial Investigation (RI) showed total chromium concentrations as high as 44,000 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg) and zinc up to 840 mg/kg. A composite waste sample contained chlorobenzene, 2-butanone, and low concentrations of ethylbenzene, toluene, 1,2-dichlorobenzene, naphthalene, phenanthrene, and fluoranthene. Landfill waste samples collected in September 1996 contained chromium, arsenic, zinc, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and phenols.

A June 1971 New York State Supreme Court order required PCC to remove all or part of the waste pile and end discharges into Cattaraugus Creek. In response, PCC reportedly transported approximately 38,600 tons of the waste material to their Markhams, New York site in early 1972. The volume of fill remaining at the site was estimated at 73,000 cubic yards. From 1972 to 1975, the pile was graded, covered, and seeded. Dense stone rip-rap and a concrete wall were placed along the bank of the stream to protect the fill material from scouring. Numerous investigations conducted since 1981 have shown that the cover material has eroded and waste is exposed in some locations, the concrete retaining wall has collapsed, and leachate seeps are discharging into Cattaraugus Creek. Sampling of the leachate during the RI showed that it contained chromium, hexavalent chromium, arsenic, zinc, chlorobenzene, and several phenolic compounds. Leachate samples collected in July 1995 confirmed the presence of chromium, hexavalent chromium, arsenic, zinc, chlorobenzene, and 2-methylphenol. The results of soil sampling conducted during the RI indicated a large area of chromium-contaminated soil outside the landfill boundary. Hexavalent chromium was also detected in 33 of 65 surface and near-surface soil samples.

In June 1991, PCC and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) agreed on a remedial alternative for the site that would include containment of landfill materials, leachate collection, and restrictions of access. In August 1996, NYSDEC reiterated that the site poses an environmental threat due to the poor condition of the retaining wall along Cattaraugus Creek. In response, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency monitored the placement of a rip-rap retention wall on NYSEG's portion of the site in February 1997. It is reported that an arm of the waste pile extended into Cattaraugus Creek in 1966. Leachate seeps that contained landfill substances have been observed entering the river along an 862-foot span adjacent to the landfill. A surface water sample collected approximately 425 feet downstream of the probable point of entry contained arsenic, chromium, zinc, 4-methylphenol, and phenol

at elevated concentrations. A sediment sample collected from the same location contained 4-methylphenol at an elevated concentrations.

Cattaraugus Creek is the only surface water body along the 15-mile target distance limit, flowing northwest from the site into Lake Erie, approximately 18 miles downstream. The stream is one of New York's top 30 fishing waters for rainbow/steel head trout and coho or chinook salmon. The section of the stream adjacent to the landfill is a popular area for fishing, and anglers fish from the creek banks across which leachate flows. Cattaraugus Creek is also the top salmonid spawning stream among Lake Erie tributaries, with concentrations that are unusual in New York. Runs of trout and salmon for spawning occur as far inland as the Springville Dam, 42 miles upstream of Lake Erie.

Status (March 1998): EPA is considering various alternatives for the site.

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at ATSDR - ToxFAQs (http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.