

NPL Site Narrative for Publicker Industries Inc.

PUBLICKER INDUSTRIES INC. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Conditions at proposal (May 5, 1989): The Publicker Industries Inc. Site occupies 37 acres along the Delaware River, adjacent to the Walt Whitman Bridge in southeast Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From the early 1900s until 1986, the facility produced various alcohols by fermentation and distillation. As production declined in the late 1970s, the company used some of its tanks to store fuel oils for other companies. In 1986, Overland Corp. purchased the facility. Shortly after starting demolition operations, Overland declared bankruptcy and abandoned the facility. A bankruptcy trustee was appointed for the estate of Overland Corp. in February 1987.

When Overland abandoned the site, it contained over 400 tanks, rail cars, and tank cars holding approximately 2 million gallons of hazardous materials; approximately 1,200 drums; four chemical laboratories with an estimated 7,000 containers of known content (including acids, explosive compounds, and flammable compounds) and 5,000 containers of unknown content; 180 cylinders holding toxic, flammable, and reactive gases; 150 pieces of electrical equipment, some containing PCBs; several hundred miles of aboveground and underground transfer lines, some covered with asbestos; reaction vessels; production buildings; and two power houses. Most of the vessels and transfer lines apparently held hazardous materials and were leaking or in disrepair due to neglect or vandalism. Security measures were inadequate.

In June 1987, a portion of the facility was destroyed in a multialarm fire during which numerous explosions and fire flares were reported. On September 4, 1987, EPA and Publicker entered into a Consent Order under CERCLA Section 106. From then until December 7, 1987, when EPA initiated a removal action, the company conducted a site assessment under the order.

The removal action significantly stabilized conditions by addressing the fire and explosion threats on the surface. Wherever possible, solid and liquid waste streams were bulked and stored on-site for future disposal. Highly reactive laboratory wastes and gas cylinders were transported to facilities regulated under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). To date, EPA has spent \$6.5 million in CERCLA emergency funds.

Shallow on-site ground water is contaminated with toluene, according to tests conducted in 1986 by a contractor to a subsidiary of Overland Corp. In May 1988, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources found toluene and xylene in deep on-site ground water in the Raritan-Magothy Aquifer. An estimated 184,000 people obtain drinking water from public wells drawing from this aquifer within 3 miles of the site, the nearest within 1.4 miles.

The Delaware River is used for recreational activities within 3 miles downstream of the site. Tides coming into the river can carry contaminants into Delaware Bay. The peregrine falcon, designated as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, nests on the Walt Whitman Bridge.

In January 1988, EPA detected n-butyl chloride in routine air monitoring at the site. The contaminant was traced to a leaking tank holding the chemicals. An estimated 3,600 people live within 1 mile of the site.

On July 7, 1988, EPA and Bruga Corp. entered into a Consent Order under CERCLA Section 106. Under the order, Bruga is dismantling and decontaminating personal property in two portions of the site it had purchased from the estate in bankruptcy.

On December 8, 1988, EPA and AAA Warehousing, Inc., entered into a CERCLA Section 106 Consent Order. Under the order, AAA is removing some stainless steel tanks and rail tank cars it owned from the site.

Status (October 4, 1989): In September 1989, EPA started a remedial action to further stabilize site conditions. This action will eliminate the continued threat of fire and/or explosion at the site by removing approximately 1 million gallons of bulked hazardous/ignitable waste from the aboveground process lines. The emptied lines will be dismantled, and pipe insulation materials, such as asbestos-containing materials, will be properly packaged and stored on-site for future disposal. All bulked and process line waste streams will be treated/disposed off-site at RCRA-regulated facilities. A 24-hour fire and security watch continues at 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) (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.