NPL Site Narrative for Hiteman Leather

HITEMAN LEATHER
West Winfield, New York

Conditions at Proposal (September 29, 1998): The Hiteman Leather Company site is located at 173 South Street (Route 51) in the rural Village of West Winfield, Herkimer County, New York. The site is approximately 14 acres in size and is bordered to the north by private residences, to the east by South Street, to the south by the Unadilla River, and to the west by the West Winfield Cemetery. The features of the site are generally comprised of several deteriorating buildings, three interconnected wastewater settling lagoons (30 to 50 feet by 150 to 340 feet each), a 2-acre wetlands area adjacent to the lagoons, and a section of the Unadilla River.

The site was operated as a leather tanning facility from 1820 to 1968 when it was closed, and has been inactive ever since with the exception of utilizing the buildings for storage intermittently. During the time the facility operated, the leather manufacturing process underwent several major changes. The raw ingredients used during the tanning process evolved from vegetable-based (tree barks) products to mineral-based (chromium salts) products and acid solutions. However, comparable changes in the treatment and disposal of the operation's wastewater were not made. By 1964, approximately 180,000 gallons of industrial wastewater were discharged from the tannery daily. The untreated wastewater was discharged into three unlined settling lagoons located immediately adjacent to and upslope of the Unadilla River. The wastewater flowed sequentially through the lagoons with the final effluents channeled into the river or diverted into the adjacent wetlands area. The settled solids in these lagoons were periodically excavated and subsequently deposited as bank material surrounding the lagoons.

In August 1959, a fish kill occurred in the Unadilla River near the Hiteman Leather Company facility. An investigation was conducted the following day by the New York State Pollution Unit. In a Pollution Report to Dr. J. R. Grearley, it was concluded that the fish kill was caused by toxic substances overflowing from the waste (settling) lagoons and not due to dissolved oxygen depletion. During the investigation the two facility waste lagoons were observed to be half-filled with settled solids. The high volume of solids in these lagoons reduced the retention time of the lagoons and allowed direct channeling of waste into the river. Following this incident the lagoons were dredged and a third lagoon was added. Dredged spoils from the lagoons were placed on the banks of the lagoons.

In mid-1996, a Site Investigation (SI) was performed by EPA. Elevated levels (relative to site reference or regional background levels) of chromium were detected in the surface soil (up to 75,000 mg/kg), subsurface soils (up to 72,000 mg/kg), and surface water (33 µg/L unfiltered; 5.7 µg/L filtered). Several other contaminants detected at low levels and primarily in the soil samples were TAL metals, pesticides, semivolatiles, and volatiles. A structural evaluation determined that most of the buildings and the stack at the site were structurally unsound and demolition was recommended. The stability of the north bank of the Unadilla River adjacent to the site was determined to be subjected to erosion by high water levels (spring runoff) which may slowly undercut the bank. In November 1996, to stabilize the north bank of the Unadilla River adjacent to the site, 500 +/- linear feet of man size Rip Rap was installed along the bank.

Status (January 1999): 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.