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News Release

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Environment - 393

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING PROGRAM TO EXPAND

Saskatchewan Environment, in co-operation with the City of Prince Albert, plans to expand an environmental monitoring program into a residential area the city's northeast.

The monitoring in Riverview is part of the ongoing assessment of areas adjacent to known creosote contamination on the former sites of two wood treatment facilities, south and west of the residences. No contamination has been found in the residential area. However, discovery of a deeply buried pocket of mild contamination behind a commercial property east of the old industrial sites has prompted the expanded monitoring.

"I want to stress that nothing has been found to indicate there is any risk people's health or homes," Environment Minister David Forbes said. "Further testing now will provide us with additional information."

"Creosote causes health problems in workers who are exposed to high concentrations of it over long periods of time," Prince Albert Parkland Health Region Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Leo Lanoie said. "Casual exposure doesn't appear to cause a lot harm. Some medicated shampoos for the treatment of psoriasis and some herbal medications actually contain creosote."

Over the next few weeks, several small test wells will be established in Riverview to facilitate soil and ground water sampling. Other testing in the residential area has shown no evidence of creosote.

"We are pleased to be part of this investigative process," Prince Albert Mayor Jim Stiglitz said. "We are anxious to complete what we believe will be the final phase of what has turned out to be an extensive investigation and remediation project."

Anyone with questions about the monitoring program is invited to attend an open-house public information session Tuesday, June 29th, at the Marlboro Inn from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. with a brief presentation at 7:30 p.m. Staff from Saskatchewan Environment, the City of Prince Albert, and the Prince Albert Parkland Health Region will be on hand to answer questions.

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Figure 3. Established Testing Locations

Following the path of the old drainage channel to the east, additional testing was conducted. Two groups of test holes, including several near Berezowsky School, showed no evidence of any contamination. However, a single test in the alley between McRaney Crescent and 15th Avenue showed some mild contamination at a depth of 17 feet. Although the creosote levels were low and pose no risk to residents, the positive result was unexpected. Further investigations will confirm the extent of impact.

Drilling the Test Wells

The new test wells will be located along the route of the old drainage channel through the residential area. Specific locations for the wells haven't yet been determined; these will be chosen considering access, location of utilities, and to minimize disturbance to homeowners. AMEC Environmental, an independent consultant working with Saskatchewan Environment and the City of Prince Albert on the project, will perform the actual test drilling operations.

The wells are established using a 30-foot tall drill rig, mounted on a three-ton truck. An auger bit will remove the soil, and samples will be collected at various depths for analysis. Once the drill reaches the required depth, at least 17 feet, the auger will be removed and the hole will be backfilled with clay. Groundwater monitoring wells, a 6 mm (2.5 inch) PVC pipe with a screen, may be installed in some locations. The top of this well will have a permanent, secure cap that will be flush with or just below the ground's surface. Water samples from these wells will provide valuable information, now and in the future.

The Results

It will take a few weeks to collect and thoroughly analyze all the needed samples. When this is complete, the results of the investigations will be made available to the public as soon as possible at an open house information session. The location and time of this open house meeting will be announced as soon as it is set.



Figure 4. Example of Truck-mounted Drill Rig

How Do I Find Out More?

Additional information, including a detailed history of the project, answers to frequently asked questions, plus links to additional information about creosote, environmental testing and analysis, may be found on the Saskatchewan Environment website at: www.se.gov.sk.ca under the heading "Environment Information for Prince Albert Residents."

Those with questions may also contact:

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PRINCE ALBERT ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING



Important Environmental Information for Prince Albert Residents

In the next few weeks, Saskatchewan Environment, in co-operation with the City of Prince Albert, will be establishing small test wells in various locations in Riverview, as part of an ongoing environmental monitoring program. It is important to note that testing in this area to date has indicated no risk to residents from contamination.

Why Monitor?

This monitoring program is needed because of known creosote contamination on the former sites of the Domtar and Saskatchewan Forest Products (SFP) wood treatment operations. The main chemicals used were creosote and Pentachlorophenol (PCP), the industry standard for treating railway ties and utility poles. Both operations were closed by the 1970s, but a half-century of industrial operations left considerable residue on the sites. Extensive clean-up operations have been conducted on both sites, and adjacent properties, since 1994. In total, more than 120,000 cubic metres of soil has been removed from the two areas, and has been treated or is awaiting treatment at the city's Bioreactor (soil treatment system).

The most recent testing on these sites and adjacent areas confirms that more work remains to be done, particularly on the present SIAST site. The chemicals involved do not readily move great distances from their source, and the remaining contamination is deep in the ground, more than 17 feet down. However, we believe it is prudent to gather as much information as possible about the situation. As the project moves ahead, the top priority for all agencies involved will continue to be the health and safety of Prince Albert residents.

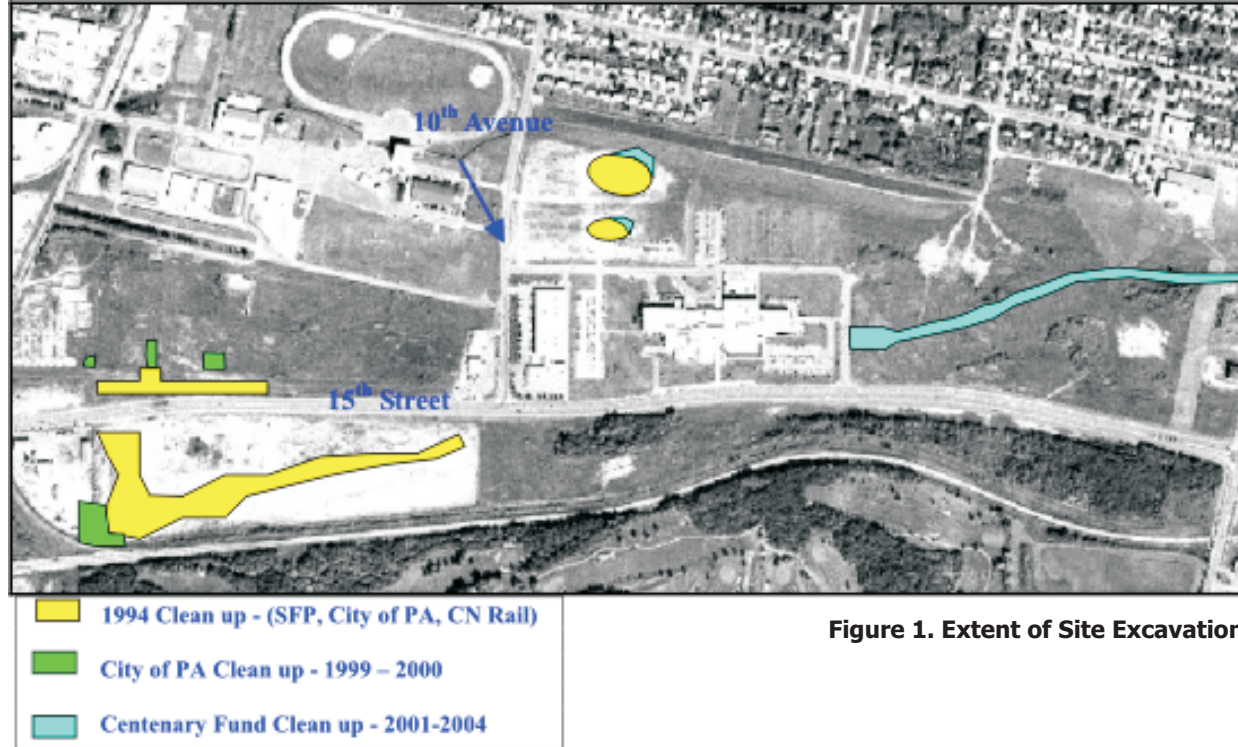


Figure 1. Extent of Site Excavations

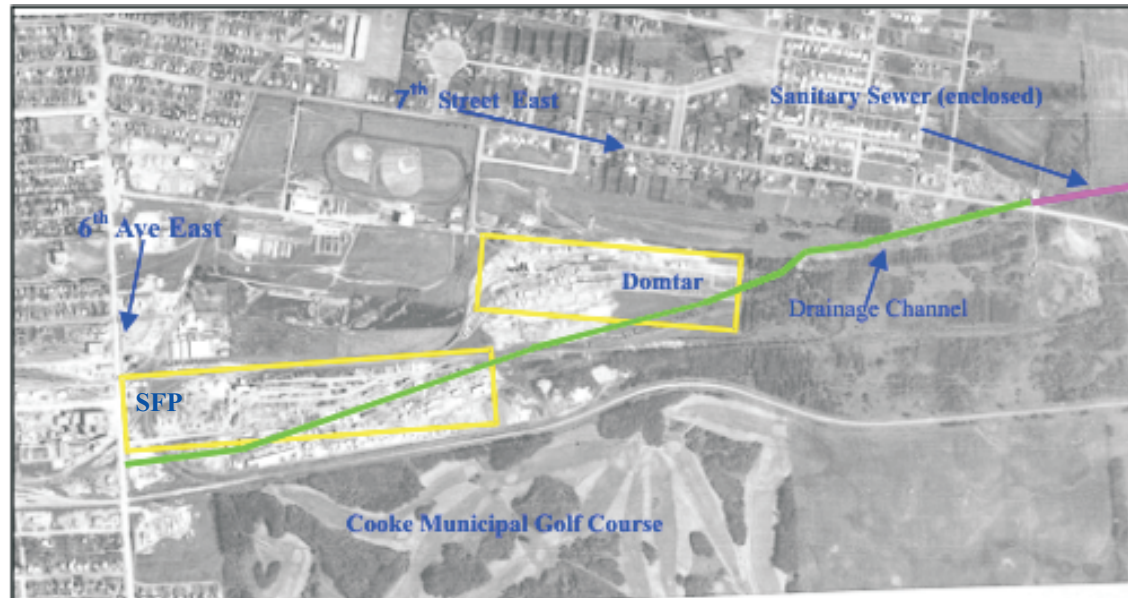


Figure 2. Site Layout from 1954

New Information

A comparison of old aerial photos with information from the 1994 and 2002 excavations shows what appears to be a continuation of an old drainage channel running east/northeast across the present SIAST property, through the city to the North Saskatchewan River. With digital overlays and GIS technology, the route of the old channel can be traced with some accuracy. Until this discovery, it was uncertain where and if the channel continued onto properties away from the SFP site and if those properties had any residual contamination.

It is likely that, in the early days of Prince Albert's history, this channel functioned as a sewer, linking with an enclosed sanitary sewer line at the present location of the junction of McIntosh Drive and 7th Street. This sanitary sewer led to the treatment facility near the river. By the 1920s, what is now known to be a portion of this longer channel, located in what was then an industrial area south of the city, was used by the newly established wood treatment facilities. By the 1970s, these plants were closed and this portion of the channel was filled in. Since then, the city has grown far beyond its original southern and eastern limits.

What has been found?

Initial testing along the portion of the channel right by the former wood treatment facilities has shown significant creosote contamination. This part of the old channel crosses the south lawn of the SIAST Technical Centre and passes under the east parking lot. There is no evidence of contamination directly under the Technical Centre building itself; 1950s aerial photos of the Domtar operation show piles of untreated wood on that portion of the site. As well, air quality testing within the Technical Centre building and testing of nearby soils and ground water indicates that the risk to the public is extremely small. This monitoring will continue. Discussions are underway now, among all agencies involved, to determine the most appropriate next steps.