



Old Fort Finishing/Old Fort Elementary School Site

February 17, 2010

Background

The Old Fort Finishing Site is located at One Water Street, Old Fort, McDowell County, North Carolina. The United Merchants and Manufacturing Company operated the site from 1947 to 1984. Toxic chemicals known as volatile organic compounds were detected in groundwater from monitoring wells in 1987 during the process of closing out the site's wastewater treatment plant. In 1989, 108 buried drums were identified in two (2) locations. The drums, sludge, and associated soils were removed from the property.

In 1988, the North Carolina Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (N.C. DENR) detected chemical contamination in private wells near the site. The chemicals detected included trichloroethylene (TCE), tetrachloroethylene (PCE), and dichloroethylene (DCE). Those families were immediately given alternative water and the households were connected to municipal water.

Currently

The facility is owned by Old Fort Industrial Park LLC. The building is leased to different entities that conduct machine work, freight line activities, and furniture manufacturing.

Site Location

The Old Fort Elementary School is located less than 1,000 feet from the Old Fort Finishing site, at 128 Mauney, Ave., Old Fort, N.C.



Purpose of the Health Consultation

A citizen concerned with cancer cases among people who worked at the Old Fort Elementary School contacted the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and requested an evaluation.

ATSDR asked the N.C. Division of Public Health (N.C. DPH) to evaluate the potential adverse health effects of contact with toxic chemicals at the Old Fort Finishing site; specifically, the contact of students and staff at the Old Fort Elementary School with these chemicals.

How was the Health Consultation conducted?

We evaluated data collected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), N.C. DENR, the N.C. Central Cancer Registry, and Old Fort Elementary School

records on volatile organic compounds, asbestos-containing materials, radon, and cancer rates in the area.

Could someone come in contact with toxic chemicals at this site?

For a person to become sick from chemicals in the environment, one has to come in contact with the chemicals. Therefore, we evaluated the different ways in which people could come in contact with toxic chemicals from the Old Fort Finishing site.

Results

- There is no indication that individuals at the Old Fort Elementary School are in contact with toxic chemicals from the Old Fort Finishing site.
- There is no indication that Individuals are in contact with asbestos within the school.
- Individuals at the school could be in contact with harmful levels of radon.

- The N.C. Central Cancer Registry did not find higher cancer cases than what would be generally expected.

Radon

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is present in soil, rock, and water. The western and mountain counties of North Carolina have the highest potential radon levels in the state.

Breathing elevated radon levels for a long time increases the risk of lung cancer.

N.C. DPH's recommendations

- Old Fort Elementary School has initiated efforts to reduce radon levels and is planning to re-test the school to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.
- McDowell County School System should initiate efforts to reduce radon levels in other schools that exceed 4 pCi/L.

Contacts:

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N.C. HACE Program: (919) 707-5900

Additional Information

N.C. Public Health: Health Assessment, Consultation and Education Program

www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/oe/hace.html (a full report is available under McDowell County).



State of North Carolina

Department of Health and Human Services

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www.ncdhhs.gov

www.ncpublichealth.com

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