

THE SUN CHRONICLE

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FRIDAY JUNE 3, 2011 Last modified: Sunday, May 22, 2011 3:44 AM EDT

Area has seen progress in cleaning waste

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The industries that built the Attleboro area over the last two centuries left enough toxic chemicals and hazardous materials to linger in the soil for generations.

But unlike some other areas in Massachusetts, this region has seen steady progress in cleaning them up, and has not suffered the same public health disasters related to toxic waste seen elsewhere.

Of the 31 sites in Massachusetts listed on the federal government's Superfund National Priority List, two are local: the Shpack Landfill on the Norton-Attleboro line and the Hatheway & Patterson site in Mansfield.

After languishing shovel-ready for years, the 40-acre Hatheway & Patterson project received a boost of federal stimulus money in 2008 and was actually completed last fall for around \$13 million, peanuts in the Superfund world.

A former wood treatment lot deemed a threat to local drinking water in 2002, Hatheway & Patterson turned out to be toxic, but not quite as difficult to clean up as officials had feared.

Digging up and trucking Hatheway & Patterson soil containing dioxin, arsenic and heavy metals took less time and roughly \$7 million less than initially projected.

Two acres of the site in Foxboro have already been turned into a commuter parking lot and the Mansfield acreage awaits the right development project.

The Shpack site, on the other hand, has not gone quickly.

A dump from 1946 to 1975, Shpack received municipal and industrial waste, including radioactive waste, from a number of sources. A roughly 10-acre site with 80 percent in Norton, it was added to the Superfund list in 1986.

The Shpack cleanup, which started in 2005 but later stalled for lack of money, is still in the initial phase of removing the radioactive contamination.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for the radioactive cleanup, has already spent \$58



A canal cuts through the contaminated Hatheway & Paterson Superfund site in Mansfield. (Staff photo by Martin Gavin)

million at Shpack and will likely spend \$70 million by the time the cleanup is over.

Tim Beauchemin, project manager with the Corps, said he expects radioactive soil removal at the site to end in July and demobilization by September.

After that, the Environmental Protection Agency will take over the cleanup.

Bob Cianciarulo, EPA manager of Superfund cleanups in Massachusetts, said once the Corps is done, planning for the secondary cleanup will probably take the rest of the year.

All told, Cianciarulo said the government was still about three to four years away from the end of cleanup at Shpack.

Although among toxic waste cleanups, the Superfund National Priority List gets most of the political and media attention, there are thousands of state and federally-mandated environmental hazards in Massachusetts that public health officials say could end up being just as serious as a Superfund.

Attleboro Health Agent Jim Mooney said in many ways Superfund is a political designation and the most critical aspect of any waste site is whether it threatens water resources.

In that way, Attleboro is somewhat protected by having over 90 percent of residents connected to city water, Mooney said.

Because of its proximity to homes, the Walton & Lonsbury site on North Avenue, a defunct former metal plating plant where hexavalent chromium and other carcinogens entered the soil, is probably the most closely watched current cleanup.

The Mendon Road site in South Attleboro, where cyanide was found, is also a significant toxic waste cleanup that never reached Superfund status.

A search of the EPA's online database found 33 federally recognized hazard sites in the 10 Attleboro area communities.

The state Department of Environmental Protection database lists separate 297 hazards, ranging from highway off-ramps to Superfunds, in Attleboro alone. North Attleboro has 166 DEP registered sites and Mansfield 115.

"When you talk about pollutants, the first question is whether it near drinking water, the second is whether people could come in contact with it" Mooney said. "Everything is measured in terms of risk."

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