Cleanup To Begin At $50 Million Superfund Site

Lynne Tuohy, AP

Cleanup at one of New Hampshire's major Superfund pollution sites is moving into high gear. The Beede Site in Plaistow was home for decades to the Beede Waste Oil disposal company, which accepted more than 28 million tons of soil contaminated with oil. The operators didn't recycle the waste as promised but let it seep into its 40-acre facility until the state ordered it closed in 1994. The company's director was sentenced in 1996 to more than three years in prison, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency reached settlement agreements with more than 1,300 of the site's former customers to help underwrite the estimated $50 million in cleanup costs.

A groundwater treatment facility built at the site will be turned on this month. The Beede Site Group, a consortium of some of the larger former patrons of the waste disposal facility that's overseeing the cleanup project, will host open houses for media and residents to show how the treatment plant and remaining cleanup operation will work. The EPA qualified the site as a Superfund site in 1996, saying it's contaminated primarily with waste oil contained in underground and aboveground storage tanks. The site also had an unlined lagoon.

Beede Site Group spokesman Greg Howard said 22 households that had been forced to use bottled water for years because their wells were contaminated were finally hooked up to public water lines this year as part of the remediation effort. Howard said a water treatment facility built at the site will begin pumping out groundwater, treating it and distributing it back into the ground. He also said truckloads of petroleum-impacted soil will be hauled to a landfill in Rochester to be used as cover material and road hull base. "The problem grew over the course of decades and is not going to be fixed in anything less than decades," Howard said.

Town Manager Sean Fitzgerald said he's glad the project is finally ratcheting up but can't overlook what the contaminated site has cost his small town of 7,600 residents. The state Board of Taxation and Land Appeals this year reduced the value of the 40-acre parcel to $200, and the Supreme Court declined to review that decision. Fitzgerald said the land had been valued at $700,000. "We have lost all tax revenue on those parcels," Fitzgerald said.

In addition, he said, the town, about 40 miles southeast of Concord, has had to bear some of the costs of remediation. "We've lost millions," Fitzgerald said. "We're a community that has been impacted significantly by past environmental bad practices that have impaired our watersheds and the wells of our families and citizens."

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