December 2007

Dear Resident/Property Owner:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its state and local partners will need your help and cooperation to conduct a pollution investigation in your neighborhoods over the next several weeks. EPA will be looking for underground vapors that possibly could be entering homes and buildings. Some of the fresh water found underground (known as ground water in environmental terms) has become contaminated and could release vapors that can rise through the soil and seep through basement and foundation cracks and holes into indoor air. This is known as "vapor intrusion." EPA will be needing property owners to sign access agreements so workers can take soil and air samples around and in your home or building.

The cooperating agencies wish to assure you there is no evidence suggesting an imminent health risk to occupants, but the potential vapor intrusion problem needs to be checked out.

Representatives from EPA along with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Health and the city of St. Louis Park will hold two public meetings this month to update the community on the situation:

Informational Meeting
on the
Highway 7 and Wooddale Avenue Vapor Study
Thursday, Dec. 13, 7 p.m.
and
Saturday, Dec. 15, 2 p.m.
St. Louis Park Recreation Center, 3700 Monterey Drive

Doors will open 90 minutes prior to the meeting start time so attendees will have the opportunity to talk one-on-one with officials from the various agencies. A formal presentation will take place that will include a question and answer session.

Below are some commonly asked questions concerning vapor intrusion issues:

Why am I being asked to participate?

Your property is located in one of two areas containing about 270 homes and structures that EPA would like to test for elevated levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs are commonly used in business and industry as degreasers, dry-cleaning fluid and metal cleaners. VOCs were released in the area and soaked into the underground water where they are now releasing the problem vapors.

Why is this testing necessary?
Ground water underneath the area was contaminated with VOCs called perchlorethylene (PCE), trichloroethylene (TCE) and vinyl chloride. Tests also found VOC vapors in the soil in the vicinity of the intersections of Gorham and Walker streets and Oxford and Colorado streets. The source of the contamination is unknown at this time. Because of the potential size, complexity and expense of this type of environmental investigation, the state asked EPA to assume control of what will be referred to as the Highway 7 & Wooddale Avenue Soil Vapor Study.

Why are we concerned about VOC vapors in indoor air?
While most people can smell high levels of some VOCS, other VOCs have no odor. At low levels there is usually no detectable odor from VOCs. Breathing low levels of VOCs for long periods of time may increase some people's risk of health problems. Even though health risks are low, officials want to make sure people's health is protected by taking steps to identify and reduce or eliminate any vapors in basements and crawl spaces.

How will the sampling be done?
With the owner's permission, EPA will conduct air and soil sampling at the target properties to see whether contaminated soil vapors are seeping into the indoor air. The first step in each structure will be to drill a small hole in the basement or crawl space floor to collect a sub-slab vapor sample, a process that takes about 45 minutes. The hole will be filled or patched when sampling is completed. Sub-slab samples can be more accurate than indoor air samples, which can be thrown off by the presence of common household products such as cleaners and paint. The sub-slab sample will be collected in a special bag and analyzed immediately using EPA's specially equipped RV called the TAGA bus. (TAGA stands for trace atmospheric gas analyzer.) Ten percent of the locations will also be sampled using a canister that will be sent to an independent laboratory for verification.

If VOCs are detected in my property, how will they be cleaned up?
If the immediate sample results analyzed in the TAGA bus indicate elevated vapor levels, EPA will double-check basements, crawl spaces, outdoor and indoor air and perform another round of sampling and testing after removing all household cleaners and paints. The Agency will take all steps necessary to fix any problems and protect the health and safety of residents.

For more information, questions or comments, you can contact these representatives:

EPA

Sonia Vega, On-Scene Coordinator, 651-296-7361, vega.sonia@epa.gov
Cheryl Allen, Community Involvement Coordinator, 800-621-8431, Ext. 36196, weekdays 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., allen.cheryl@epa.gov

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