

DEP visits Alcoa site to access tainted soil

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EDGEWATER VIEW

EDGEWATER - State investigators from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have visited Veterans Field and the source of its newest contamination, the former Alcoa site, to assess the situation at both after soil testing forced construction work at Alcoa to come to a halt last month, borough officials said.

Edgewater's special environmental counsel, Timothy Corrison, advised the borough to suspend all activities at the former aluminum plant site on April 16, citing a definitive link between the PCB-laced crushed concrete discovered on Veterans Field in October and materials at Alcoa.

"We have concerns about the present safety to workers on the site as well as surrounding neighbors," he wrote in a letter to the borough, asking a stop-work order to stay in place until the owner of the Alcoa site, developer Fred Daibes and his company 38 COAH Associates LLC, could provide confirmation that the contamination did not pose a health hazard.

As officials await that confirmation, Licensed Site Remediation Professionals (LSRPs) in charge of monitoring the site are working with the state to carry out a remediation plan, according to Borough Attorney Philip Boggia.

LSRP Rodger Ferguson, of Pennjersey Environmental Consulting, would not discuss specifically where the contaminants were found, only saying, "the investigation is ongoing."

Construction was underway on an upscale spa and a hotel at 660 River Road at the time of the work-stop order. The site is also home to the Avalon apartments and the affordable housing complex 38 COAH.

Several residents expressed fears last week that the affordable housing units, situated close to the construction area, sit on tainted soil.

"There are people there, there are children there," said resident Valory Bardinias.

Boggia said there is no evidence so far to suggest that 38 COAH is contaminated. If evidence does arise, he said, the borough "will certainly take all steps necessary" to address it.

"We're as concerned as anybody about protecting the public," he said.

The borough is currently in mediation with another company owned by Daibes, Waterside Construction LLC, over the newest contamination at Veterans Field.

Remediation and renovation work at the park had to be put on hold last year after Waterside trucked in crushed concrete from Alcoa to cap soil on the ball field without submitting it for mandatory testing first.

The contractor, which is also building the spa and hotel project, said it had assumed the concrete was clean since the DEP had previously allowed materials from the site to be reused.

Corrison, the borough's special environmental counsel, noted in his letter that he was not aware of a recycling permit ever being issued to Waterside.

"There appears to be no dispute that the Alcoa site is the source of the PCB contaminated fill material improperly imported to and onto Veterans Field," he wrote.

Last month, the governing body announced plans to use the remaining balance of its \$9.7 million contract with Waterside, about \$4 million, to fund the cleanup of the new toxins and finish all other remaining work on the borough's premier park.

Officials hope to begin the process sometime this month.

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