

November 15, 2013

Richmond, CA Shoreline Radioactive Material Discussed at RSSA CAG Meeting 11/14/2013

See press links below.

Richmond Confidential 11/15/2013

State officials confirm radioactive material present at Richmond southeast shore site

By Kevin Hume and Brittany Johnson

<http://richmondconfidential.org/2013/11/15/state-officials-confirm-radioactive-material-present-at-richmond-southeast-shore-site/>

KTVU News, 10 p.m., Thursday, 11/14/2013

<http://www.ktvu.com/videos/news/richmond-contamination-concerns-neighbors-near/vCJL96/>

Background

Radioactive materials at the prior Blair Landfill, some with 100-times higher than background levels at/along the SF Bay Trail South 51st Street Access Path, have been confirmed by representatives from the California Department of Public Health Radiological Health Branch and California Environmental Protection Agency Department of Toxic Substances Control.

DTSC regulators have known about samples confirming radioactive material for more than three years. Last night's (11/14/2013), Richmond Southeast Shoreline Area Community Advisory Group (RSSA CAG) monthly meeting was the first time the public heard a first-hand description of partial site conditions.

Radioactive materials confirmed in the surface soil and below surface soil include bismuth-214, lead-212, radium-226, thorium-228, thorium-232, uranium-233, uranium-235 and uranium-238.

In general, the 3-acre Blair Landfill which is owned by Union Pacific Railroad and the bordering Zeneca property is contaminated with radioactive material and other hazards that appear to have been dumped by Stauffer Chemical and Stauffer Metals between the mid-1950s into the early 1970s. Blair Landfill was a much larger 15-acre to 20-acre area prior to Hoffman Boulevard conversion into I-580 in the 1970s.

The current area designated as Blair Landfill is a 3-acre parcel of undeveloped land that is bordered on the west by the San Francisco Bay Trail South 51st Street Access Path. The East Bay Regional Park District has an easement through the Union Pacific Railroad and Zeneca properties for the South 51st Street Access Path. The Blair Landfill 3-acre parcel is bordered on the east by Baxter Creek which runs directly into SF Bay and rises with high tide.

The radioactive material could be from Stauffer Chemical alum mud, but more likely is the residual of uranium, tantalum and niobium melting and other radioactive material melting in Stauffer Metals' newly patented electron beam furnaces in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Stauffer Metals had numerous top-secret contracts with the Department of Defense, Air Force and Navy to develop new alloys for munitions, planes and ships and with the Atomic Energy Commission to develop crucibles and other materials that could withstand the heat in electron beam furnaces and/or nuclear reactors during the melting of pure uranium and/or plutonium.

Last night, the California Department of Public Health Radiological Health Branch Health Physicist John Fassell, described Stauffer Metals melting tantalum as part of secret weaponry experiments. Tantalum and niobium contain elevated levels of thorium and uranium – both confirmed as high as 100-times background in soil samples at the Blair Landfill.

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Overall, the CDPH-RHB staff were highly professional, passed on information as though the community is made of mature adults and they did not hedge when asked direct and penetrating questions. CDPH-RHB staff were balanced, refreshing and their presence was appreciated by all, even though the information is troubling and unsettling. DTSC staff on the other hand, continued the dithering, hand-wringing, no-action positions, including refusing to post radioactive caution signs because "it would scare the public" and non-committal about site characterization and/or possible hazardous waste removal.

The RSSA CAG has asked CDPH-RHB to support the CAG's request that the area be signed immediately with the minimum sign requirement until more is known about the full extent of the radioactive material. Notably, only DTSC can order signs posted – CDPH-RHB does not have the authority to order signs on a hazardous waste site – they can only recommend. Current signs state "No Trespassing".



That is the same sign story the community heard from DTSC when requesting that the Zeneca and UC Richmond Field Station sites be fenced and signed in 2005. The CAG responded in 2005 with a request to the CDPH Environmental Health Investigative Branch and the Contra Costa County Health Services Department (County Doctor) to co-write a list of recommendations which included fencing and signing that the CAG then worked in the press and public until fences and signs went up. It took more than a year of relentless weekly pressure before DTSC included perimeter fences and signs in an updated Order.

Radioactive exposure is life-time cumulative. Allowable radioactive exposure limits used by our regulators are based on outdated science (1970s?) for a typical white healthy male weighing about 185 pounds. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is in the process of updating exposure limits based on newer research, but the publish date is unknown. To date, NRC and CDPH-RHB have no reference exposure levels for pregnant women, children, elderly, compromised immune systems (cancer and other diseases), multiple exposures to other cumulative radiation (cancer treatment, radioactive work, other). There are no reference regulatory limits for pets (dogs on the SF Bay Trail and South 51st Street Access Path) or environmental receptors including wildlife.

Exposure to the radioactive material is complex because some material is not highly water soluble but is more prone to be wind-blown as dust and/or run off into the creek and nearby property with rain. Other radioactive material on the site is heavier and more soluble and could be picked up by nearby shoreline fish where fisher people can be seen along the SF Bay Trail daily.

The radioactive half-life for the materials on the site is nearly forever.

The regulators stated that exposure (to the material that they know about so far) becomes a serious health threat at 900-hours. That does not include allowance for someone like me who has already had mega-mega doses of radiation in the last ten years to kill bad-ass cancer, 30+ body and head scans and radioactive liquids pumped through the body multiple times to light-up organs for countless tests.

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- That 900-hour threshold is not an allowance for a pregnant woman, a newborn or a pet out for a walk on the South 51st Street Access Path.
- The 900-hour threshold is not an allowance for the dogs that roam around in the radioactive surface soil and go home to sleep with children and adults and/or shed in homes for long periods before being bathed.
- When the CDPH-RHB staff were asked if the radioactive material can be washed off – the answer was probably not completely . . .
- Someone else posed a situation of a person just having a radioactive treatment for something like prostate cancer and spending time in the area near radioactive material. The CDPH-RHB staff responded that it probably wouldn't be a good idea.
- Another community member suggested signs would keep the sizeable homeless population from sleeping on radioactive soil; they would probably choose another location if provided a clear message about what is in the area.

My suggested community goals:

First – sign the area and keep it clearly signed as radioactive

Second – characterize and recharacterize the soil and groundwater until clean margins are confirmed

Third – dig and ship the material to a permanent professionally managed hazardous waste site for all time into the future

Aggressive timeline – five years

Realistic timeline given DTSC as regulator – probably twenty years

Current DTSC regulatory plan that will take between five and twenty years (based on the community's direct first-hand experience with the site)

- 1) Try to get access permission from Union Pacific Railroad for Astra-Zeneca (prior Stauffer Chemicals) to continue sampling and site characterization. (DTSC has not used their extraordinary Cal EPA muscle and regulatory might to force site access by telling Union Pacific to grant access or DTSC will issue an Order to Union Pacific to characterize and clean it up at their own expense.)
- 2) Characterize the surrounding unfenced and unsigned areas owned by Astra-Zeneca.
- 3) Consider clean-up options.
- 4) Issue clean-up orders.

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Link to the press release announcing the 11/14/2013 Richmond Southeast Shoreline Area Community Advisory Group (RSSA CAG) meeting

http://rssacag.com/rssa%20sites/CAG%20Public%20Documents/Executive%20Committee/RSSACAG_PressRelease_ShorelineRadioactiveMaterial_MeetingAnnouncement_11042013_20kb.pdf

Link to the RSSA CAG formal/written questions to the regulators requesting attendance at the meeting

http://rssacag.com/rssa%20sites/CAG%20Public%20Documents/Executive%20Committee/CAGExecutiveCommitteetoDTSCRadionuclidesBlairLandfill_UnionPacificRailroad_Zeneca_FINAL_09242013_581kb.pdf

Link to 4/18/1973 aerial photo showing current location where radioactive material confirmed in surface soil and below surface soil samples 2009 and 2011

http://rssacag.com/rssa%20sites/Zeneca/Maps%20Drawings/StaufferChemical_BlairLandfill_LiquidGold_ShorelineAerial04181973_ConfirmedRadioactiveSampleAreaOnSFBayTrailAccessPath2009and2011_7MB.pdf

Link to Google Earth photo showing current location where radioactive material confirmed in surface soil and below surface soil samples 2009 and 2011

http://rssacag.com/rssa%20sites/Zeneca/Maps%20Drawings/Zeneca_UCRichmondFieldStation_BlairLandfill_Liquid%20Gold_ShorelineGoogleEarth2009_ConfirmedRadioactiveSampleAreaOnSFBayTrailAccessPath2009and2011_811kb.pdf

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