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Toxic plume linked to gas plant Report for KeySpan, owner of Hempstead facility, finds possible exposure paths but no imminent threats

BY MARK HARRINGTON

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A former utility gas-plant site in Hempstead once classified by the state as requiring "no further action" has spawned a nearly 4,000-foot plume of toxic material and could present exposure pathways to people at or near the site, according to a recently released report.

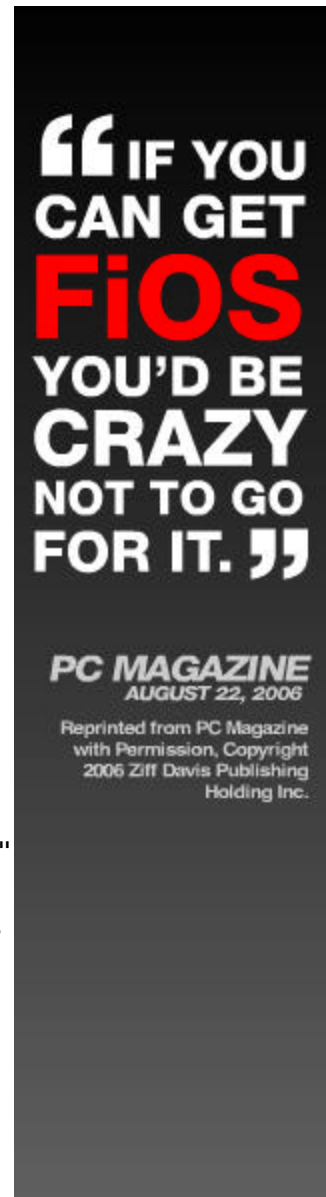
But despite finding toxins in air, water and soil samples that are up to tens of thousands of times the allowable levels, including at a nearby playground and an adjacent medical office, the report concludes there are "no significant or imminent threats to human health that warrant an interim remedial action."

The "final remedial investigation report," prepared for site owner KeySpan Corp. by a New Jersey firm and accepted by the state departments of health and environmental conservation, identified "pathways through which people on site and in the vicinity of the site could be exposed to potentially hazardous material."

KeySpan declined to comment last night. The report was provided to Newsday by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which is overseeing the cleanup.

One expert who has read the report said the pollution is so extensive that he believes remediation should begin without delay, along with signs alerting visitors to the exposure hazards.

"This is just a massively polluted site," said Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting, an Ithaca-based environmental database company. "What's really shocking is they've known about this site at least since 1990 and haven't done any remediation work."



Indoor air sampling in an unidentified medical building detected 18 known chemicals, although 43 other chemicals showed no detectable amounts. Among the chemicals identified were: butanone, acetone, benzene, chloromethane, ethanol, m/p-xylenes, methyl tertiary-butyl ether, methylene chloride, oxylene and toluene.

The report identified numerous other potential exposure pathways from the 7.5-acre site, which is located at Intersection Street and North Franklin Street in Hempstead.

"Current off-site human populations considered in the exposure assessment include adult commercial workers, adult and child visitors to commercial establishments, adult and child residents, and adults and children using the park adjacent to the site," the report said.

The report notes that at least one other company has reported oil spills in the area that may have contributed to some of the toxin levels.

KeySpan inherited the site following the 1998 takeover of the Long Island Lighting Co. A 1993 report prepared for LILCO made recommendations for cleaning up the site, noting that it contained 57,600 cubic yards of toxic soil - nearly three times that of a Bay Shore site that has recently seen a flurry of cleanup activity.

KeySpan yesterday acknowledged engineering snafus at the Bay Shore site that have halted installation of metal sheeting intended to block toxic coal-tar sediments from continuing a 4,000-foot long plume there.

Recommendations from the Hempstead report include the development of a remedial technology evaluation to determine how best to deal with the toxins, further testing, including near the medical office building and a Village of Garden City property, and quarterly groundwater sampling. It also recommends collecting additional data for two years.

That's too long for David Denenberg, the Nassau legislator who has led a charge to accelerate the cleanup and who called the findings and delays in cleanup "egregious and unconscionable."

"It's a sad commentary on a responsible party [KeySpan] that wants to see no evil and hear no evil and a state agency [the DEC] that is indicative of everything that could be wrong in a bureaucracy," said Denenberg (D-Merrick).

KeySpan is scheduled to meet June 28 with residents about the Hempstead site.

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