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Local News - Thursday, March 17, 2005

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Emerson to expand water testing Company plans to dig wells on S. Albany St. at Wood, Park streets

JENNIE DALEY
Journal Staff

ITHACA -- Documents recently filed at the Tompkins County Public Library indicate that Emerson Power Transmission is adding two groundwater monitoring wells to the initially planned seven when construction begins next week.

This comes as welcome news to residents who live north and west of the wells and have been pushing since last fall for their homes to be tested for contaminants originating from the former Morse Chain plant, which Emerson now owns. The wells are slated for the intersections of South Albany Street at Wood and Park streets, the first evidence that investigations are expanding to the area west of the first test phase.

Data from the wells will help to indicate if contamination from the former Morse Chain site spread west of the current test zone. The move to the west is the first of what is expected to be a continued expansion of the test area into Phase III.

In explaining the company's motivation for adding the wells, David Baldrige, a spokesperson for Emerson, said the company "responded to concerns raised by residents at the March 3 meeting," referring to a public meeting on testing in the area organized by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

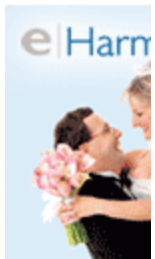
Why it matters

- **WHAT:** Two new groundwater monitoring test wells are planned for the area west of Phase I testing. This is the first evidence that indoor air sampling could expand in this direction.
- **WHAT'S NEXT:** Test results for the second round of home air samples are expected shortly and state and Emerson officials say analysis of those results will lead to the formation of the next area for testing.
- **MORE INFORMATION ONLINE:** New York State Department of Environmental Conservation: www.dec.state.ny.us; New York State Department of Health: www.health.state.ny.us; for information on testing compiled by area residents go to: <http://6sys.no-ip.info/~tjweber/ship/>

On the Net

To read all past Journal stories on Emerson and the issue of TCE pollution, go to www.theithacajournal.com/toxic

Timeline



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Wells to test groundwater

The groundwater monitoring wells will be looking for traces of chemicals, particularly trichloroethene --TCE -- which originated from a leaking fire water reservoir on the plant site. TCE, which was used to degrease chains manufactured at the plant, can cause dizziness or damage to the nervous system if inhaled in large quantities. Long-term high level exposures have also led to cancer in laboratory animals.

The same packet of documents that mentions the new wells also indicates that two requests for additional testing the DEC made in September were put off by Emerson and still have not been addressed.

"There seems to be a discrepancy between who is leading and who is following. One would assume that the DEC and (Department of Health) should be forcefully leading but, in this, Emerson seems to be taking the lead," said Rick Grossman, a Park Street resident, referring in particular to two requests made by the DEC in August that were declined by Emerson in a Sept. 8 letter and have yet to be addressed.

The letter was from Derek Chase, Emerson's director of environmental affairs, to Carl Cuipyo, an engineering geologist for the DEC. In it, Emerson responds to the DEC's comments on its indoor air assessment work plan.

In one comment, the DEC requests water samples from an "artesian well at 212 Wood Street and the subslab flow at 222 Wood Street," both of which are within a block of the Phase I test area.

Emerson's response was that they would like to arrange a visit to inspect the sites before agreeing to sample them.

Jennifer Dotson, who lives at the home with the artesian well, said they've made their home available but heard nothing from Emerson representatives.

"We contacted the DEC and said 'Yes, please. There's a range of availability' and we haven't heard anything," Dotson said.

- 1928-1983: Borg Warner owns the company and building on Aurora Street known as Morse Chain, which manufactures automotive components. Prior to 1983, Morse Industrial uses the solvent trichloroethene, or TCE, to degrease metal parts.

- 1983: The plant is purchased by Emerson and becomes Emerson Power Transmission.

- 1987: Investigations reveal TCE has leaked into soil and groundwater from an underground fire water reservoir on the property. Emerson reports the spill to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

- 1988: Emerson enters into a consent order with the DEC to conduct a remedial investigation and clean-up feasibility study. These are completed in 1990 and 1994, respectively.

- 1994: Final groundwater remediation plan approved by the DEC.

- 1996: An upgrade and expansion of the remediation system approved in 1990 is completed.

- 2003: According to Emerson, company officials meet with DEC to discuss implementing a plan for additional vadose zone testing. DEC approves plan in Feb. 2004.

- April 2004: In response to neighbors' concerns Ithaca Mayor Carolyn Peterson orders soil testing around a road project downhill from the spill site. The tests come back negative.

- May, June 2004: Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting, calls on DEC to reopen the spill case, citing statistics he says demonstrate that the remediation system is not effective. Vadose zone testing is done in neighborhoods around the plant.

- July 2004: Vadose zone tests are made public. TCE and other site-related chemicals found. The DEC asks Emerson to provide a

She added that the old well is in the yard and bubbles up year round. While it does not serve as a source of drinking water, Dotson said their proximity to the test area has made them very interested in having it tested.

Walter Hartman, who lives in the house with water in his basement, asked for testing of it at the March public meeting and was met with surprised responses from Mary Jane Peachey, a regional engineer for the DEC. Peachey expressed no knowledge of the site or the water in the basement, despite the DEC referencing it in an August document.

At the meeting, Peachey asked for more information but the DEC's interest has not transformed into action.

"Nothing has happened. No one has contacted us," said Lisa Borst, Hartman's wife.

No vadose zone monitoring

Emerson also declined a DEC request for three to five additional monitoring sites for the vadose zone "to the south and west of South Albany and South Titus streets to more fully define vapor mitigation."

The vadose zone is the soil between the earth's surface and groundwater levels.

Emerson said it "does not agree additional vadose zone monitoring is warranted at this time" but would reconsider after more test results were available.

The first round of tests were analyzed prior to the public meeting in March and the second round is expected within the month.

David Baldrige, spokesperson for Emerson, said the company has no plans for any additional vadose zone testing at this point but is trying to determine the quality of groundwater first.

The two new wells slated for South Albany will not look at the vadose zone, only groundwater. They are being incorporated into a plan for seven other wells that was approved by the DEC in December, construction of which was held up until the worst of the winter weather passed.

Walter Hang, environmental watchdog and president of Toxics Targeting, said he finds the pace of work and Emerson's treatment of the DEC "shocking."

"The DEC is getting led around on a leash by this company," Hang said. "We

proposal for additional clean-up measures and indoor air quality testing in area homes.

- August 2004: The first public meeting is held to answer questions about chemicals, test results and next steps.
- October and November 2004: 49 homes are tested for airborne site-related chemicals in Phase I.
- January 2005: The test area expands to include seven more homes in what officials call Phase II.
- February 2005: The Emerson site is reclassified from a Class 4 to a Class 2, meaning the DEC determined hazardous waste from the site constitutes a significant threat to the environment.
- March 2005: A public meeting is held by the DEC and Department of Health to share analysis of the first round of indoor air tests. Officials say once they have results for the second round of tests, which included homes in Phases I and II, further testing is expected in a wider area and on-site.

– Emerson Power Transmission and Journal research

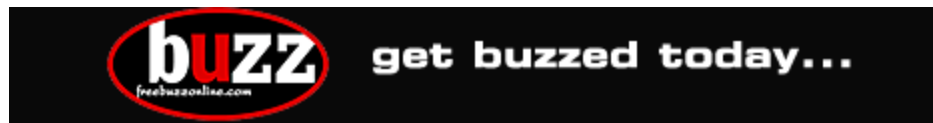
have a company saying they're good corporate neighbors, but to the DEC they're thumbing their nose."

Representatives of the DEC did not return calls for comment Wednesday.

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Originally published Thursday, March 17, 2005



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