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PETOSKEY

EPA to test for toxic vapors in some homes

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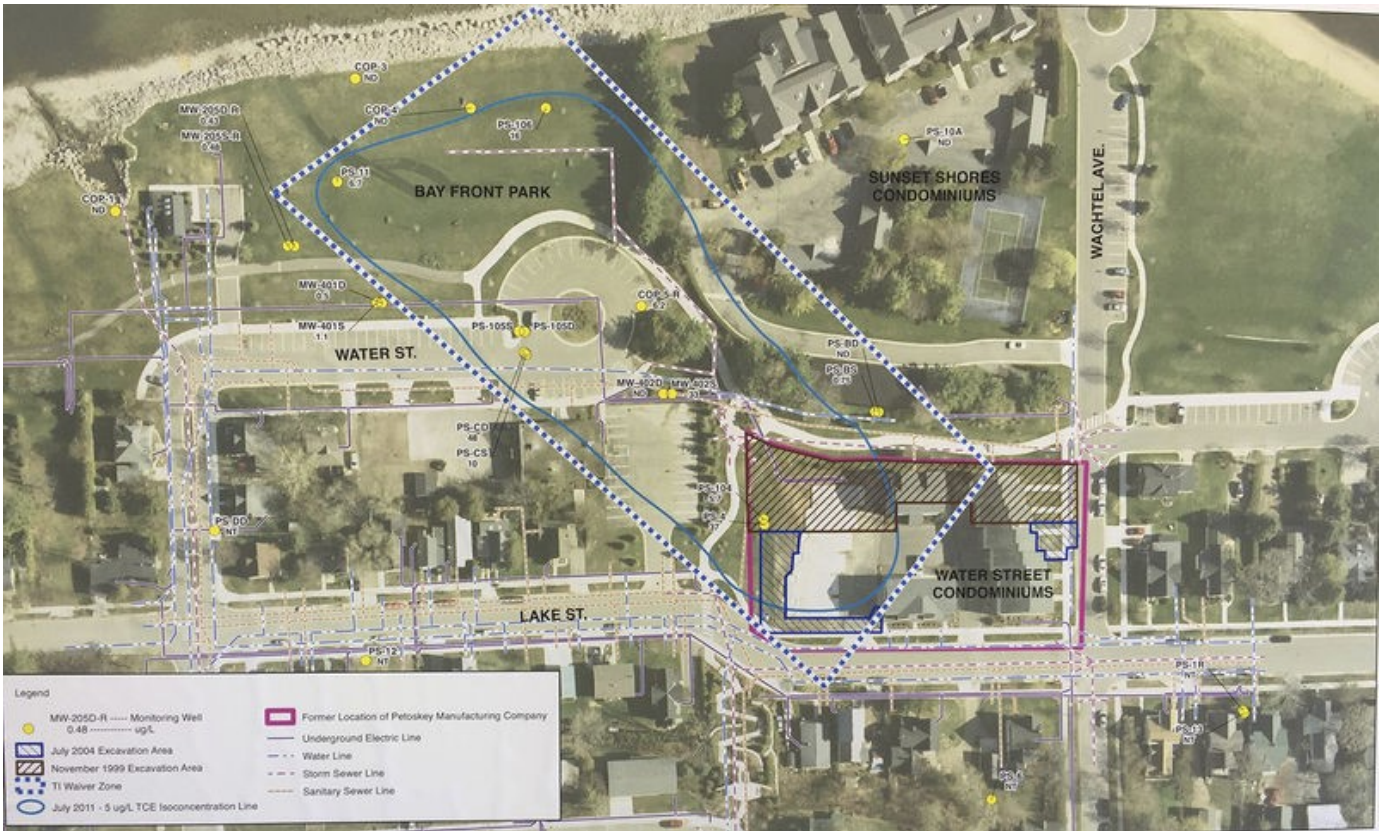

Courtesy image/EPAThis map shows the area in Petoskey in which EPA officials want to test homes for possible harmful chemical vapors coming from underground contamination.

Quick Read: EPA to test for toxic vapors in some homes

PETOSKEY — Officials with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will soon be contacting residents in a Petoskey neighborhood near an underground chemical contamination site to check their homes for the presence of possible hazardous vapors.

Officials from the EPA, working together with representatives from

the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, hosted two public information session Monday at the Petoskey City Hall to provide information on the effort.

Agency officials are hoping to gain access to homes in the area of the former Petoskey Manufacturing Co. site. The former manufacturing facility was located on the corner of West Lake Street and Wachtel Avenue, where condominiums now stand.

The agency will be conducting sub-slab and indoor air testing to try to determine if potentially harmful gasses may be moving up through the soil and into properties through cracks or holes in basements and crawl spaces and then into living areas. This type of environmental issue is called “vapor intrusion.”

The gas of concern is called trichloroethylene, or TCE, which agency officials said contaminated groundwater in the area from operations at the form Petoskey Manufacturing Company.

According to an EPA fact sheet on the site, the source of the contamination, at 200 W. Lake St., was the former Petoskey Manufacturing Co. It was a small fabricating operation that made small trim parts for the automotive industry. In addition to the plating and casting operations, the plant began painting operations in the late 1960s. Manufacturing operations were conducted on the site from 1946 to 2000, and the facility was demolished in 2004.

EPA officials said the company improperly disposed of solvents and paint sludge on the ground surface outside the company’s building. This resulted in contaminated soil and groundwater near the site and near one of the city’s municipal water wells. Contamination at the site was first discovered in September 1981 when drinking water samples from the Ingalls municipal well showed high levels of volatile organic compounds (contaminants that evaporate into the air), including xylene, toluene, TCE, and

ethyl benzene. The well ceased operations in 1997, and several types of cleanup efforts have taken place at the site.

EPA officials noted that Superfund sites such as the Petoskey Manufacturing site are reviewed every five years and in a 2014 review, vapor intrusion was identified as a potential issue at the former PMC source area.

“The science of the health effects of TCE has evolved in the 15 years since the original source area cleanup was completed. EPA’s screening criteria for determining whether vapor intrusion might be a health concern are now much lower and conservative. That means concentrations of TCE considered safe are much lower than they use to be,” the fact sheet reads.

Beginning in January 2017, EPA conducted sampling under the slab of some residences built directly over the former Petoskey Manufacturing facility site. The sampling looked for “soil gas,” which is vapors trapped between soil particles. After preliminary results showed high levels of trichloroethylene under some units, EPA scheduled indoor air sampling this March to determine if TCE could also be detected in the air inside those residences. Results showed that some units did have levels of TCE that could pose a health risk. EPA and the local health department notified affected residents of the results and provided temporary air purification systems.

Additional sampling this spring helped EPA complete an engineering design of a long-term vapor mitigation system, which is now being installed. The agency is expanding its investigation to determine if vapor is moving from the former manufacturing facility site or the contaminated groundwater. EPA is prepared to install additional vapor mitigation systems, if necessary, officials note in a fact sheet about the project.

Officials said the testing process requires only residents to have an air sampling unit smaller than a standard-size propane tank in

their home for a 24-hour period and allow crews to drill about a 2-inch diameter hole in the ground outside their home to collect air samples.

For now, officials have identified about 75 properties that they hope to include in their initial testing. Depending on the results of the initial testing, the area could be expanded to include more homes. The current round of testing essentially extends to properties that are about 100 feet from the edge of the groundwater contamination plume. That plume includes the northwest corner of the former Petoskey Manufacturing site and runs to the northwest, roughly to the edge of the circle parking area at the end of Water Street.

According to information provided by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, potential health effects from exposure to high levels of TCE include congenital heart defects, immune system function effects, liver and kidney problems, development of some cancers, and less severe concerns such as nose, throat and lung irritation, headaches, dizziness, loss of coordination, memory issues, and mood changes.

Officials are hoping to begin doing the testing work in the next several weeks, but say the larger project will take much longer.

If vapors are detected in a home, a ventilation system can be installed that will remove the vapors, officials said.

Anyone would like more information, may contact Heriberto León, community involvement coordinator with EPA, at (312) 886-6163 or leon.heriberto@epa.gov; or Owen Thompson, remedial project manager, at (312) 886-4843; or at thompson.owen@epa.gov.

EPA officials noted that representatives from the agency will always have a picture identification.

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