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Sturgeon Still Being Tested

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From Columbia Missourian

The Environmental Protection Agency office in Kansas City, Mo., and O-H Materials Co. are still testing for chemical contamination in Sturgeon, four months after the Jan. 11 train derailment that spilled potentially dangerous chemicals.

Harry Gilmer, an EPA engineer, said the ground near the spill site is "clean and okay," and that Saling Creek is also safe for humans and aquatic life.

Meanwhile, O-H Materials Co. — a cleanup firm hired by Norfolk and Western Railway owners of the railroad car carrying the chemical — is using a carbon filtration process to clean up ponds and surface runoff water. EPA is using a special well to monitor ground water near the site to determine how far the contaminated water has moved

from the original site.

The soil surrounding the site, contaminated by 20,000 gallons (75,700 liters) of orthochlorophenol, a type of carboic acid, has been dug up, and any dangerous contaminants, such as dioxin, have been removed, Gilmer said.

Saling Creek on the west side of Sturgeon is also clean, Gilmer said. Safe levels of contamination are 100 or fewer parts of the chemical to one billion parts of water. The concentration in Saling Creek is now less than one part of chemical to one billion parts of water.

Gilmer said, "If there is contamination, it is below detection limits."

"No action was taken to clean up Saling Creek, because the microscopic life — or bacteria — destroyed any contamination. It was a natural cleaning process," Gilmer said.

O-H Materials Co. has been using carbon-filtration to accelerate the dissolution of chemicals in ponds and surface runoff water.

In this process, fresh water is forced into the soil to dissolve the chemicals. The water spreads out and floods to the surface. It is then tested for its concentration level, filtered through the carbon-filtration units, cleaned and recycled through the system again.

When O-H Materials Co. finds the orthochlorophenol contamination level is below 100 parts of chemical to one billion parts of water — which is the safety level — EPA will test the water, Gilmer said. "The water cannot be discharged until it is found to be acceptable. By 'acceptable,' we mean it will not create harm or endanger anything, including aquatic life."

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