

Early, Marti (DEC)

From: Early, Marti (DEC)
Sent: Thursday, February 04, 2010 2:19 PM
To: Undisclosed recipients
Subject: Update #5, sulfolane investigation

Dear concerned citizen,

This is the fifth email we have sent to update people interested in the issue of sulfolane in groundwater near the North Pole Refinery. We hear from a number of you, and we hear the frustration behind questions some people ask. We wish we had all the answers and had answers which would satisfy everyone. Some aspects of the sulfolane issue are difficult to address because we don't have enough information to speak with certainty. Also, the answers are often technical, couched in parts per billion, reference doses, chemistry and the mysterious nature of things that happen underground.

We can say with certainty that Flint Hills moved swiftly to get people bottled water when the company learned that the groundwater contamination had spread beyond the refinery's property. We can also say that DEC is working with the City of North Pole and Flint Hills to develop a long-term solution to the problem. We are committed to providing citizens with information on the science behind the chemical, the contamination and the cleanup, and, in association with the Alaska Department of Health, facts on health impacts of sulfolane.

DEC's website summary of the sulfolane issue is now updated to include a new fact sheet on the cleanup of sulfolane. The web address is <http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/sites/npolerefinery.htm>. The fact sheet has a discussion of regulatory standards for chemicals and how they are set, both for drinking water and for contaminated site cleanup. If you're interested in this, you can download it directly at www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/docs/fairbanks/npr-cl-levels.pdf. The fact sheet starts out with general information, delves into technical details, and ends with a discussion of DEC's current cleanup level for the refinery.

We've also added several new questions and answers to our Q&A section on our website. These appear below. If you have questions or concerns that aren't addressed here, please feel free to e-mail us or call. Our contact information follows.

Q. Sulfolane was first used at the refinery in 1985. Why didn't DEC know of the problem sooner?

A. We weren't looking for it. Sulfolane was not on the federal or state government's list of regulated chemicals, and it's not on the list of contaminants of concern for a typical fuel spill. During the refinery's history, there were some large gasoline spills, plus a few minor sulfolane spills. In 2001, the refinery's owner at the time, the Williams Companies, was testing some wells to better understand the area of spilled fuel which had gone underground at the site. A test for hydrocarbons in a well we expected to be clean showed an unusual chemical signature. A closer look at lab data indicated this was sulfolane. We then required Williams to begin testing for sulfolane.

Q. How much sulfolane was in the groundwater before DEC first knew of it in 2001?

A. We don't know of any tests previously done at the refinery like the one which discovered sulfolane, so we can't say right now what concentrations existed in the past. Computer modeling will be used to make some estimates of historical concentrations.

Q. I'm very concerned about my property value—what can you do?

DEC's work can help with property value primarily in making the facts known and eliminating exposure to the chemical. Property values are affected by many things, but a possible problem with your water might depress your property values. Knowing about a risk is always better than not knowing, however, so then the risk can be reduced. Solving the problem should protect your property values, and that's what we're working to do. We

hope that the work Flint Hills is doing to find out what houses have wells with sulfolane problems and to connect them to city water will raise property values.

If you have questions about DEC's work on this issue, please write or call me or those listed.
Sincerely,

Marti Early
Community Involvement Specialist
ADEC - Spill Prevention and Response - Contaminated Sites Program
marti.early@alaska.gov
907-465-5206

For more information:

On contaminated sites, contact DEC: Marti Early, 907-465-5206, marti.early@alaska.gov or Ann Farris, 907-451-2104, ann.farris@alaska.gov

On health related information, contact the Alaska Division of Public Health, Nim Ha, 907-269-802, nim.ha@alaska.gov

On public water supplies, contact DEC, Cindy Christian, 907-451-2222 cindy.christian@alaska.gov

On water testing or other refinery issues, contact Jeff Cook, Flint Hills Resources, 907-488-5104
jeff.cook@fhr.com