

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

October 2007

Rhone-Poulenc, Museum of Flight Expansion

Facility: Former Rhone-Poulenc industrial site, Tukwila, WA, ID #WAD009282302

Location Tukwila, WA

RCRA Status: 3008(h) Order on Consent. East parcel: Corrective action complete without controls.

Lead Facility: US EPA

Contact: Christy Brown/EPA Seattle, 206-553-8506, brown.christy@epa.gov

Summary

A parcel of the former Rhone-Poulenc industrial site in South Seattle, WA, has been cleaned up, designated “cleanup complete without controls,” and is slated to become part of an expanded Museum of Flight. According to Museum officials, current plans include building a new Space Gallery on the property, erection of a covered structure for numerous large aircraft stored outdoors, and space for future use by Aviation High School.

Background

The Rhone-Poulenc site is a former industrial facility located south of downtown Seattle near the Georgetown neighborhood, an environmental justice community. The site is located on about 750 feet of shoreline of the Lower Duwamish Waterway. The Lower Duwamish Waterway is a Superfund site. Industrial operations occurred from the 1930s through 1991. The site has been vacant and unproductive since the plant closed.

From the 1930s, several companies manufactured chemical products at the site, including glues, resins and hardeners. Beginning in 1952, first Monsanto and then Rhone-Poulenc used the facility to make vanillin, which is used in flavoring foods and creating drugs. The chemical processes, most of which took place in the West Parcel, contaminated soils and groundwater. The site has a long history of above- and below-ground releases of contaminants such as toluene (a toxic solvent), arsenic, mercury, copper, caustic pH and other pollutants. Sampling has detected contamination of groundwater flowing into the Lower Duwamish Waterway. Contaminants threatened chinook salmon and bull trout, two endangered species found in the waterway.

In May 2006, the current owner of the property approached EPA with a proposal to accelerate cleanup of the eastern parcel so that it could be sold to the Museum of Flight, one of the largest air and space museums in the world. The Museum needed a location for a Space Gallery exhibit, and covered space to display their large aircraft, as well as space to accommodate the Aviation High School, which is losing its current space in 2009. The expansion project was on a tight timeline, and the property transaction was scheduled to be completed by the end of December, 2006.

Clean Up

The site is being cleaned up with EPA oversight. It is a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) corrective action site. Cleanup was conducted under an Order on Consent. The property was divided into two parcels (East and West).

According to site research, the majority of the contamination (and thus cleanup activities) is located on the West Parcel, where most of the manufacturing and chemical storage was located. Cleanup work on the West Parcel is continuing under a separate schedule. However, buildings on the West Parcel have been demolished and debris removed. It has been regraded, paved, fenced and leased to a new tenant.

The Museum was interested in purchasing the East Parcel of the facility. After the Museum approached the current owner regarding the property, the owner and EPA worked to expedite cleanup. EPA used a multi-incremental sampling approach, which allowed characterization of the East Parcel to proceed quickly and cost effectively. Contaminants were mostly copper and PCBs.

A voluntary removal action was completed on the East Parcel in the fall of 2006; approximately 5,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil were removed. The property owners voluntarily cleaned the site up to unrestricted use levels instead of industrial use levels. Comprehensive sampling showed that the remaining soil meets the cleanup goals for the site.

Cleanup on the East Parcel site was completed by the property owner prior to sale of the property to the museum. In its contract to purchase the property, the Museum specified that the land be cleaned up to allow unrestricted use. EPA issued a determination of "corrective action complete without controls" for all portions of the East Parcel except one small area where confirmation sampling has not yet demonstrated that contaminants are below the final cleanup level. The "corrective action complete without controls" determination means that EPA has determined that human health and ecological risks have been appropriately addressed and that corrective action activities are no longer necessary on most of the East Parcel. This determination confirms that the property is suitable for any future use, and may be redeveloped and/or transferred without restrictions.

A contingent ground water remedy was required for the excluded area of the East Parcel, and EPA anticipates that the entire East Parcel will meet the final cleanup levels within six months.

A status/comfort letter was issued to the Museum of Flight. The status/comfort letter listed the current and former property owners who are Respondents under the Order and are responsible for conducting investigation and cleanup at the property, briefly reiterated the history of investigation and removal actions on the East Parcel, and discussed the contingent remedy required by EPA.

Reuse

The East Parcel has been sold to the Museum of Flight and will become part of an expanded Museum. According to Museum officials, current plans include building a new Space Gallery on the property, erection of a covered structure for numerous large aircraft stored outdoors, and space for future use by Aviation High School.

The Museum is an important part of this environmental justice community, attracting more than 400,000 visitors annually and providing a source of pride for the community. The Museum's expansion will attract more visitors to the area and enhance the life of the community. This expansion will also allow them to display parts of their collection that are currently stored elsewhere and augment their educational mandate by providing permanent space for the Aviation High School, which provides enhanced math and science education for 400 students in the Seattle area.

For more about the site: www.epa.gov/r10earth/rhone-poulenc.htm