

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



West Lake Update

July 6, 2015

EPA Oversight – A Vital Part of the Remedial Process at West Lake

The Role of an On-Scene Coordinator

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the lead federal agency charged with addressing the West Lake Landfill Superfund Site in Bridgeton, Mo. At West Lake, EPA exercises its enforcement oversight authority to ensure the Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) complete the required work following rigorous scientific standards. One of the key people in this work is Adam Ruiz, a chemical and nuclear engineer. Adam has been an On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) for EPA since 2007.

“I’m looking for any issues that may arise from sampling, reviewing screening data results from sampling, and ensuring that the PRPs follow procedures, such as sampling plans and quality assurance plans,” Ruiz said.

While Lenexa, Kan., is home to EPA’s regional office, Ruiz works out of a field office in Fenton, Mo., about 25 miles from the site. “I start at 6:15 in the morning to drive up to the site. I’m there at 7 a.m. for the safety meeting, where we discuss the plan for the day.”

While conducting oversight at the landfill, EPA OSCs like Ruiz spend their days outside in the elements, always keeping eyes on activities at the site. For the recent site sampling efforts, Ruiz typically has three teams under his oversight: the drilling team, the safety team, and the PRPs’ project management team. “In total, I oversee about eight people on site,” he said.

EPA’s coordination of work with the PRPs’ contractors is one of the primary missions, according to Ruiz. “The point of having us out there is to demonstrate an EPA presence, making sure that the plans approved by EPA are carried out consistently,” he said.

EPA places the highest emphasis on scientific integrity, and having an OSC on-site while the work is carried out ensures contractors conducting the work do so in a scientifically sound manner. To conduct this oversight, it’s critical to work safely, according to Ruiz. With the uneven terrain and heavy machinery, even the most basic safety precautions go a long way in ensuring the physical safety of the OSCs. A critical element is wearing appropriate clothing and equipment while on site. “We’re typically in Level D personal protective equipment, which is hard hats, steel-toed boots, safety glasses, and high-visibility attire such as reflective vests,” he said.

After the field work is done, the day’s not over for the EPA OSC conducting oversight. Even though contractors may finish their day around 5:30 p.m., Ruiz isn’t done until his final meeting with the PRPs’ project manager. “We end the work day by reviewing the work

completed that day and discussing the work planned for the next day,” he said.

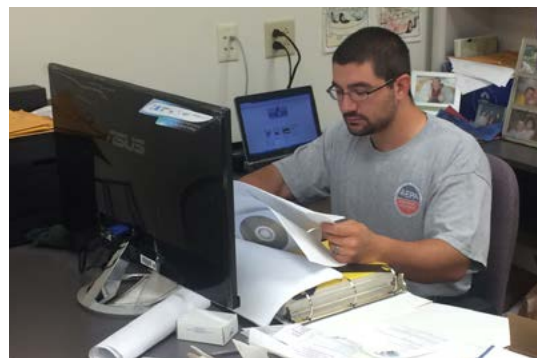
The close coordination between EPA and the PRPs on-site plays an im-

portant role in overall oversight and planning. “There’s a lot more coordination at this site to make sure the state, the county, and the EPA are all on the same page. My role is to coordinate with all of these parties and the Remedial Project Manager (RPM) at EPA,” he said. Ruiz’s ability to relay information from the field to Brad Vann, EPA’s RPM for the site, helps the agency make decisions regarding the necessary next steps at the site.

Ruiz enjoys his job as an OSC and feels it is rewarding. “Being out in the field, it’s where the boots hit the ground, and I can actually see the good work we are doing for EPA,” he said. It also provides him an opportunity to spend time in the communities in which he is working, serving as an ambassador for the agency, he said.

As EPA continues to work toward a final remedy at the West Lake Landfill Site, EPA oversight of the PRPs will continue. Ruiz is one member of a rotating team of OSCs who provide the critical eyes to make sure work conducted on-site is completed according to the plans approved by EPA.

Adam Ruiz is an On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) with EPA Region 7. He began his career at EPA as an intern, and became a full-time OSC with the Superfund division in 2007. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Kansas in Chemical Engineering and his Masters degree in Nuclear Engineering from North Carolina State University.



EPA’s Adam Ruiz, an On-Scene Coordinator with the Superfund division, reviews site files at his Fenton, Mo., office.

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