



# Sites in Reuse

## Kerr-McGee (Reed-Keppler Park) Superfund Site

Junction of Yale and National Streets, City of West Chicago, Illinois 60185



*Views of the Prairie Oaks Family Aquatic Center at Reed-Keppler Park in the City of West Chicago, Illinois*

**Site size:** 11 acres of larger 90-acre park

**Site Reuses:** Recreational park with new family aquatic centers



West Chicago,  
Illinois

At Reed-Keppler Park, residents can now enjoy a complex of baseball fields, a skateboard park, a large maintained greenspace, and new family aquatic center. However, the presence of radioactive contamination on 11 acres of the park's property complicated both its continued use by residents, and the development of its popular aquatic center.

The Prairie Oaks Family Aquatic Center at Reed-Keppler Park replaced a small pool facility built in the 1950s that was experiencing ongoing maintenance problems and high operating costs. The Park District initially considered redeveloping the pool in 1978, but was hampered by local city official's concerns over lack of available funding. Completed in 1990, the new five-acre facility now includes a large multi-use pool area, water slides, sand volleyball courts, and concession and changing facilities. The new aquatic center is one of the central amenities of the remediated Reed-Keppler Park.

Located in a largely residential area of West Chicago, Illinois, Reed-Keppler Park is 90 acres in size. The Park District purchased the land from a local rail road company in the early 1930s and developed it as community park. The property included a small municipal landfill, which remained open until 1974. Over a 40-year period, radioactive mill tailings, derived from production processes at the West Chicago Rare Earths Facility, were used as cover

material at the landfill, as well as fill material in the surrounding park area.

Though once thought to be safe for general use, U.S. nuclear regulatory agencies raised initial concerns over these radioactive mill tailings in the late 1970s. Following a study of the park area, officials believed that contamination was limited to the former landfill area, which was subsequently fenced in 1978. However, over the next ten years park district workers continued to encounter mill tailings outside the former landfill area during park renovation activities. Remediation of contaminated areas in the park came under EPA jurisdiction 1990, when the the site was listed on the National Priorities List.

The location of the park's original pool facility - and the proposed location for the new Prairie Oaks Family Aquatic Center - was 700 feet east of the old landfill. The Park District and EPA were uncertain as to whether or not there was any contamination in the area. Further environmental testing would be needed before development of the facility could begin.

## LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: THE REUSE PLANNING PROCESS

Development of the Prairie Oaks Aquatic Center required careful coordination between the West Chicago Park District and officials at EPA, as well input from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and State environmental agencies. Planning for the new facility began in the late 1980s/early 1990s, before EPA began its Remedial Investigation of the Reed-Kepler Park to determine the full extent of radioactive contamination. EPA was initially wary of the idea of moving forward with the aquatic center's development before the completion of the Remedial Investigation. However, after ongoing discussions, EPA agreed to allow the project to proceed if the Park District conducted a smaller Remedial Investigation in the proposed development area.

One challenge during the process was EPA's insistence that the Park District not use any environmental consulting firm that had previously been associated with the site's potentially responsible party (PRP), Kerr-McGee Chemical Corporation. However, once an appropriate consultant (Versar Inc.) was found, EPA provided the Park District and its consultant with ongoing guidance on how to conduct an appropriate Remedial Investigation. Dave Thomas, director of the West Chicago Park District, describes the relationship as helpful and responsive, with the only disagreements focusing on technical aspects of conducting the Remedial Investigation.

The Park District's Remedial Investigation found several small areas of contamination. Fortunately, most of the contamination was located in areas that could be avoided by small changes in the aquatic center's design. (EPA later addressed these areas during their remediation of the larger site area). After reviewing the results of the Remedial Investigation, EPA allowed the Park District to proceed with development in 1993, with the stipulation that baseline monitoring of background radiation occur throughout construction. Construction began in 1994 - concurrent with EPA's larger Remedial Investigation - and the Prairie Oaks Family Aquatic Center opened June 16, 1995.



*Remediated playfield located in the center of Reed-Kepler Park*

While developing the Prairie Oaks Family Aquatic Center and remediating the Reed-Kepler Park site, the West Chicago Park District and EPA also had to respond to public concern over the safety of the facilities. In order to reduce these concerns, the Park District published informational articles in the local newspaper and encouraged residents to call with any questions or concerns (EPA officials subsequently answered many of these questions). EPA also developed a series of fact sheets describing the remedial activities at Reed-Kepler Park. These fact sheets were made available to park and aquatic center users.

Reflecting on the development of the aquatic center and the larger remediation of Reed-Kepler Park, Dave Thomas notes that once the Park District and EPA developed a better understanding of each others' roles in the remediation of the site, they were able to amicably work through a variety of difficult issues with the community's best interest in mind. One result of this collaboration is the Prairie Oaks Family Aquatic Center.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

#### Site Contact:

David Thomas  
Director of Parks & Recreation  
West Chicago Park District  
157 West Washington Street  
West Chicago, Illinois 60185  
Phone: (630) 231-9474  
Web Site: [www.wc-goparks.org](http://www.wc-goparks.org)

#### EPA Region 5:

Rebecca Frey  
Remedial Project Manager  
77 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-3507  
Phone: (312) 886-4760  
Email: [frey.rebecca@epa.gov](mailto:frey.rebecca@epa.gov)  
Site Summary: [www.epa.gov/region5/superfund/npl/illinois/ILD980824007.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region5/superfund/npl/illinois/ILD980824007.htm)