

Union Pacific Railroad Tie Treating Plant Cleanup Site



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality

What's happening?

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is overseeing cleanup of historical contamination from past industrial operations at the Union Pacific Railroad Tie Treating Plant Site in The Dalles.

Environmental regulations enacted in the 1970s have required the facility to change its operations to ensure the environment is protected. These laws prevent the facility from discharging chemicals onto the ground or into waterways. They also require past operators to clean up contamination from past industrial activities.

Cleanup actions at the site since the 1990s include removing contaminated soil, installing a protective cap at Riverfront Park, installing and maintaining a groundwater treatment system, and monitoring contamination to ensure it remains contained to the site.

Contamination at this site does not pose a health risk to people or the environment as long as the existing protective systems remain in place.

Where's the contamination and what're we doing about it?

The railroad tie treatment facility has operated in The Dalles under various owners since 1922. The facility treats wooden railroad ties and other products with chemical compounds to make them weather and insect resistant. The original cleanup site included the tie plant property and areas of Riverfront Park and the Columbia River shoreline north of the plant. Cleanup at the park and river shoreline was completed in 1995. Cleanup at the plant property is ongoing.

Groundwater: Groundwater contamination under the site is primarily from historic unlined wastewater lagoons that collected contaminated washwater from the facility until the 1980s. Contaminants flowed from these lagoons down into the groundwater. These lagoons were removed, and the current tie plant processes its wastewater in an enclosed, leak-proof treatment system. Since 1998, a groundwater treatment and containment system has been extracting contamination and preventing it from migrating offsite. DEQ monitors the performance of the groundwater treatment system and performs periodic sampling to ensure contamination does not migrate offsite into other wells or waterways.

Riverfront Park and Columbia River Shore:

Previous contamination in soil and sediment at Riverfront Park and along the shoreline of the Columbia River originated from an underground pipe that carried stormwater runoff from the site to the river from 1937 to 1971. Approximately 5,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil was removed from Riverfront Park in 1992. In 1995, a multi-layered cap was constructed along the Columbia River shoreline to contain and prevent contact with contaminated sediment, and the area was revegetated.

Surface soil: Historical tie plant operations dripped and spilled chemicals onto soil on the property. The 1997 DEQ cleanup plan specified better management of daily operations at the plant. This included removing and capping exposed contaminated soil to prevent contaminant contact, site access controls, expanded worker safety requirements, and a drip and spill management protocol. Remaining contaminated soil is currently covered by buildings and other infrastructure, and must be removed prior to site reuse or construction of new infrastructure. The current tie plant operator must use a drip pad to capture any dripping chemicals and maintain a spill monitoring plan to prevent and immediately clean up any potential future spills.

The cleanup plan

UPRR's corporate predecessor owned and operated the plant from 1922 to 1927. UPRR used two different companies to operate the plant from 1927 to 1987. Kerr-McGee Chemical Corporation purchased the plant in 1987 and continued wood treating operations through 2004. AmeriTies acquired the plant in 2005 and currently operates the plant. UPRR still owns the plant property and is responsible for the environmental investigations and cleanup.

DEQ began investigations of the site in 1984. Creosote components, pentachlorophenol, fuel oil, ammonia, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and arsenic from historic operations were found in soil and groundwater near the

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plant. Contamination was also found in soil and sediment in Riverfront Park and along the shoreline of the Columbia River; the offsite contamination at the park and river was cleaned up in the 1990s.

DEQ required UPRR to investigate the nature and extent of contamination at the site in 1989. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency listed the site on the National Priorities List, which is also known as Superfund, in 1990. DEQ remains the lead agency for overseeing the investigation and cleanup of the site. Under an agreement with DEQ, UPRR is responsible for paying all cleanup and investigation costs.

DEQ issued a cleanup plan, known officially as a Record of Decision, for the site in 1996. The plan involves removal and capping of soil and sediment, extraction and treatment of contaminated groundwater, recovery of creosote from the groundwater, and preventing the migration of existing contamination. Approximately 139,834 gallons of creosote oil have been recovered from groundwater under the site through June 2020. Recovery and monitoring at the site will continue indefinitely.

More information

Find more information and site documents at <https://go.usa.gov/xpdhH>

Alternative formats

DEQ can provide documents in an alternate format or in a language other than English upon request. Call DEQ at 800-452-4011 or email deqinfo@deq.state.or.us.