

Eugene Water & Electric Board – Manufactured Gas Plant site remediation

Frequently Asked Questions



What is this project?

This project removes significant areas of contamination from the site of a former manufactured gas plant (MGP) at 701 E. Eighth Avenue, next to the Willamette River. EWEB, Cascade Natural Gas Corp. and PacifiCorp are performing this cleanup to satisfy Oregon Department of Environmental Quality requirements under the 2015 Records of Decision for this site to address legacy contamination.

Why are you doing it?

Operation of the MGP facility between 1907 and 1950 provided the residents of Eugene with a reliable source of heat and light, but also left behind an oily waste product. After significant study of the site, DEQ's decision (in the 2015 RODs) was to require the removal of liquid waste materials to reduce the risk of releasing contamination to groundwater and the Willamette River.

How does the remediation benefit Eugene?

Benefits of the project include: 1) putting hazardous materials where they belong - at a hazardous waste landfill that is designed to safely contain them, and 2) eliminating the potential for MGP waste to reach the Willamette River. Once remediation is complete, the City of Eugene is planning to construct a new intersection on the site that provides a southern gateway to the new downtown riverfront development.

What's a Record of Decision?

In a nutshell, a Record of Decision (ROD) tells responsible parties what they must do under state law to address environmental contamination, after reviewing site conditions and remediation alternatives. The ROD explains the selected remedial action and future requirements for the site.

How was contamination discovered?

In the mid-1990s there was a cleanup/investigation at the nearby University of Oregon Riverfront Research Park that suggested the presence of contamination at the adjacent MGP site. The presence of MGP contamination was confirmed after the property owner, EWEB, provided DEQ with site sampling data.

Why not just leave it alone?

The site is very close to the Willamette River, and though the contamination does not currently present a significant risk to human health or the environment, there is evidence that suggests that changes in underground conditions (due to natural events such as earthquakes) could lead to a release of MGP oils to groundwater or the Willamette River. The waste needs to be removed to reduce the risk to the river, wildlife and human health.

What will you do with the materials that are removed?

Crews will load contaminated soil directly from excavation areas into lined dump trucks. Once full, the load will be covered to control vapors and it will be trucked to the hazardous waste landfill in Arlington, Ore.

What's that smell?

The smell, something like mothballs or driveway sealer, is coming from the waste products from the former MGP facility as they are removed from the site, including naphthalene and benzene.

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Naphthalene is especially noticeable; it has the distinct odor of mothballs and can be smelled at very low concentrations.

What are naphthalene and benzene?

Naphthalene is a component of coal tar and a byproduct of fossil-fuel combustion. It is found in dyes asphalt, and mothballs. Pure naphthalene gives mothballs their distinctive odor.

Benzene is a petrochemical found in crude oil. It is a component of gasoline and is used to make many products, including plastics, dyes and detergents.

I see people in suits and respirators – am I safe?

Workers at the site will have the highest exposure to these substances and you may see them working in protective gear, including white coveralls and respirators. These preventative measures are required by OSHA for people who routinely work in close proximity to contaminated materials. Site workers will be in close contact with the MGP material for 10 to 12 hours per day until the job is done. Respirators are not necessary for people passing by or working in the surrounding area.

If I can smell these chemicals, is this safe for me and my family?

The presence of MGP odors does not necessarily mean that a passerby is at risk. You can smell naphthalene long before it reaches DEQ levels of concern; the health-risk level is approximately 10 to 50 times higher than the level at which most people can smell naphthalene. For conditions at this project site, the concentration of naphthalene is not expected to reach unhealthy levels. Benzene will also be at levels that are significantly lower than the levels considered to be unhealthy.

However, the odor is unpleasant, and EWEB has developed a vapor management plan that strives to limit unpleasant odors to the immediate site boundary, long before they rise to levels that are unsafe in areas away from the site. EWEB will provide multiple layers of air monitoring for naphthalene and benzene – including handheld and static monitors in the project area – to help ensure the safety of residents, workers and visitors in the area, as well as on-site project crews.

What if it impacts my home/business?

Please contact EWEB if your home or business is impacted by strong odors so alternative management strategies can be developed. While no process is perfect, EWEB is using methods that are well-established by the remediation industry to limit odor impacts on our neighbors, including:

- Placing excavated contaminated soil directly into dump trucks and hauling it away quickly, so it doesn't sit on site to waft odors for long periods of time.
- Limiting the size of the excavation, covering any piles of soil with tarps, and using odor-controlling foam whenever needed.
- Periodic site and neighborhood walk-throughs by the engineering team to proactively verify the effectiveness of odor controls. The team will adjust controls as needed to manage odors and impacts to neighbors.

Remediation work is expected to take approximately six weeks. Work is planned for late summer

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to help avoid wet conditions that could cause erosion during excavation of contaminated soils.

EWEB and DEQ want to hear from you if conditions are unpleasant. Please contact us at the numbers listed below.

What kind of traffic impacts will there be during construction?

When soil is being hauled, you can expect to see five to 10 dump trucks per day coming in and out of the project area. Some will be transporting contaminated soil to Arlington and others will be delivering clean soil for backfill. Work is expected to have minimal impacts to local roads and no impact to nearby rail tracks.

Starting in mid-September, construction crews will close a portion of the South Bank Path between the Hilyard Street connection and the Frohnmayr Bridge. This new closure will effectively close the path between the DeFazio and Frohnmayr bridges. Path users should detour through Alton Baker Park until remediation work is complete and the path reopens in late October.

During the MGP project, the City of Eugene will also be working on a new riverfront park and reconstructing sections of the South Bank Path near the project area. This work will keep the section from the DeFazio Bridge to the Eighth Avenue spur closed through 2020.

What about dust while trucks are hauling away soil?

The dump trucks hauling excavated soil to the hazardous waste landfill in Arlington, Oregon, will be covered to minimize dust while they're traveling. They will take the shortest route possible to reach I-5, reducing the amount of time they're hauling near residences and businesses.

Who's in charge of this project?

EWEB is the property owner and is in charge of the project. Cascade Natural Gas and PacifiCorp are also responsible parties. EWEB, Cascade and PacifiCorp are paying for the cleanup. DEQ is the regulatory agency and will be overseeing the cleanup activity to ensure that public health is protected. EWEB is not involved in the City of Eugene park development project.

What happens after cleanup?

The former MGP site is currently a parking lot. After remediation of the site, the City of Eugene has plans to build a new intersection in 2020 to provide access to the future Downtown Riverfront development and is a key component of the City's downtown quiet zone for the railroad.

How can I get more information?

Go to eweb.org/mgp for more information, or contact EWEB/DEQ directly:

- Jared Rubin, EWEB Environmental Specialist, 541-685-7609
- Joe Harwood, EWEB Communications, 541-685-7471
- Don Hanson, DEQ Project Manager, 541-687-7349