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EPA plans to find TCE source in Croydon

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A toxic chemical that has polluted groundwater in the Croydon section of Bristol Township will be the main topic of a meeting scheduled Thursday by the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection.

Targeted for cleanup by EPA's Superfund, the chemical trichloroethylene, or TCE, is a suspected cancer-causing agent.

A common industrial and household solvent extensively used prior to 1975, TCE has been found in high levels in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

The meeting to discuss EPA plans for the Croydon site is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. in the Bristol Township Municipal Building, 2501 Oxford Valley Road.

Because of the high amounts of TCE found in Croydon, the environmental agency listed the area on its proposed Superfund cleanup list two years ago. But before the cleanup begins, the agency will test water samples for TCE, an EPA spokeswoman said.

TCE was discovered in water samples taken from wells in Croydon, which lies within a highly industrialized area. In addition to TCE, test samples also revealed heavy metal compounds, such as chromium and copper.

EPA listed the Croydon site, which is bordered by the Neshaminy Creek and Delaware River, on its proposed Superfund list in 1985, indicating the agency believes the chemical poses, or could pose, a threat to the environment.

EPA hopes to acquire numerous groundwater samples in the area that could lead to the source of contamination, said agency spokeswoman Nancy Sinclair.

Although the Rohm and Haas Co. landfill is in the Croydon area, both the company and EPA say that is not the source of the TCE. The company said it has never used TCE in its manufacturing process.

Rohm and Haas found that many of its own sampling wells in the landfill showed traces of TCE, however. During the landfill study, commissioned in 1983, the engineers found TCE and perchloroethylene, or PCE, in monitoring wells around the site. The report indicated an aquifer that extends 25-feet beneath the Rohm and Haas plant has been contaminated, as well as another deep aquifer that extends 60-feet below the manufacturing area.

TCE was found in high amounts in the deepest portion of the aquifer, according to the engineering report prepared by Betz, Converse, Murdoch. However, EPA officials have pointed out that the ground slope in the Rohm and Haas plant area indicates TCE is not seeping from the landfill into the Croydon area.

In 1985, Bucks County health officials said there were 160 private wells and 20 municipal wells contaminated by the chemicals. Cleanup had occurred at 14 of the sites, they said.

In 1979, nearly 300 water wells in Bucks and Montgomery counties were found to have high levels of TCE and PCE, according to a listing by the National Governor's Association and the Agency for Toxic Substances.

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