

Toxic chemicals saturate West End property



[James Bruggers](#), @jbruggers 10:59 a.m. EST December 31, 2015

Chemicals found at hundreds to thousands of times higher than officials consider to be safe.



(Photo: James Bruggers, CJ)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- New testing confirms preliminary screening in 2010.
 - Cleanup plan could be presented by mid January.
 - Metro Councilman David James wants "responsible parties to be responsible."
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The idle Black Leaf industrial property in the Park Hill neighborhood is awash with chemicals, potentially complicating a cleanup, the latest round of environmental testing confirms.

Some soil samples on 29 acres that was once home to a pesticide manufacturing plant and other industrial facilities were found to contain dangerous pollutants at hundreds to thousands of times higher than state officials consider safe.

"It was shocking to me to see the levels so high," said Carl Hilton, executive director of the West Jefferson County Community Task Force, which has been tracking state and federal efforts to characterize and clean up contamination on the property and nearby residential lots.

"This is not a simple matter," the retired DuPont environmental manager said. "It's quite complex."

Kentucky environmental regulators have identified four companies that they hold responsible for contamination: The property's owner, Louisville Industrial Park LLC, and three other companies that inherited liability through mergers, acquisitions of former owners or subsidiaries. They are Exxon Mobil, Occidental Chemical Corp. and Greif, Inc. Those companies paid for the study that was completed earlier in 2015, which involved analyzing 224 soil samples at 61 locations and examining other environmental conditions on the property.

The companies will submit a cleanup plan for the property, 1391 Dixie Highway, in January.

"I'd like to see the responsible parties be responsible," said Louisville Metro Councilman David James, whose council district includes the Black Leaf site. "I'd like to see that property be cleaned up and allowed to become something useful and positive for the community. Right now it's not anything but a chemically-contaminated site next to a residential neighborhood, and that's not acceptable."

Efforts to reach the property's owner, Tony R. Young, were not successful. And his company's registered agent, EDLG Service Co., did not respond to a request for comment.

Exxon Mobil spokesman Todd Spitler confirmed that a "proposed corrective action" - a cleanup plan - would be submitted to the state in January. He would not comment on how much the cleanup might cost or a timeline for its completion.

Chemical contamination

The 2015 site characterization study followed soil removal and replacement in 2013 and 2014 at about 70 homes adjacent to Black Leaf in a residential cleanup that Kentucky officials have described as their largest ever in an urban setting.

Among the new findings:

- [Arsenic](#) is a problem at 22 of 61 sampling locations, with levels as high as 15 times above what state officials consider safe.
- Pesticides including long-banned [DDT](#) were found to exceed safe levels for industrial property at nine locations. At one location, DDT was found 300 times higher than its industrial screening level, and the banned pesticide [dieldrin](#) was 500 times higher. The DDT contamination was as much as 1,400 times higher than considered safe for

residential property and the dieldrin was more than 2,200 times higher than safe residential screening value.

- Twenty-three locations had unsafe levels of [polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon](#) (PAH) compounds that were higher than acceptable for industrial property, and 51 of the 61 locations exceeded safe levels for residential settings. One of them, benzo(a)pyrene, was at levels as high as 50 times the safe screening value for industrial property, and more than 1,000 times higher than the residential screening level.

PAHs are found in coal, crude oil, and gasoline and several are considered cancer-causing.

The contamination was largely contained to the top two feet of the soil.

The study also found contaminated sediment in catch basins and manholes.

The Black Leaf site is named for a nicotine-based insecticide that a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency handbook says is no longer made. Over most of the past century, the property was also occupied by chemical and wood-products businesses.

"The overall concentrations are in the range of what one might expect at a site that manufactured and packaged pesticides ... along with other historical industrial operations on the property," said Tim Hubbard with the Kentucky Division of Waste Management. He said the results were consistent with earlier environmental screening at the Black Leaf property.

Kentucky's preliminary sampling in 2010 on the property also found high levels of pesticides, as well as toxic heavy metals such as arsenic and lead, as well as benzo(a)pyrene, classified as a probable human cancer agent.

Arsenic in the blood

A 2014 University of Louisville blood and urine analysis of 53 people who live near Black Leaf identified two people with elevated readings of lead or arsenic. But the team did not have funding to look for pesticides or other toxic contaminants found on and near the Black Leaf property.

Marvin Hayes and his wife live next to the property and had high arsenic levels in their blood. This week, Hayes described the property as a blight with buildings that are falling apart and pollution that still washes into the neighborhood, though not as much as before officials worked to curb runoff.

"The people in the neighborhood, they express their concerns," Hayes said. "We want it cleaned up."



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A rusted vent pipe extends through an opening in the fence that surrounds the polluted Black Leaf property in the Park Hill neighborhood of Louisville. (Photo: James Bruggers, CJ)

Hilton said cleanup options could include removing contaminated soil or covering it with some sort of cap. He said residents will probably want the contaminated soil taken away, which would be more expensive.

"Most of the residents want something done with that land," Hilton said, adding that he expects the West Jefferson task force to discuss the study and any cleanup plans during its upcoming monthly meetings. "It's going to take a long time, and that's one of my concerns."

In 2012, the Courier-Journal reported that it took state and federal environmental regulators 25 years to investigate the pollution at Black Leaf after initial surveys in the mid 1980s indicated there might be problems.

Reach reporter James Bruggers at (502) 582-4645 and at jbruggers@courier-journal.com.

If you go:

The West Jefferson County Community Task Force meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. at the Nia Center, 2900 W Broadway.

<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/tech/science/environment/2015/12/30/black-leaf-property-awash-toxic-chemicals/77977950/?from=global&sessionKey=JdDerqrL8nbIVvxxaSPj6Pt4ifceLsUnQ-18x2d76DfVewahYpIrP47rpSoHQx3Dx3DygEbY8Yn88WyN561yKk7Egx3Dx3D-kh1H480KYwAHbhZBKab1x2Fgx3Dx3D-4UvXaHD2CnS8tZQAFcoCeQx3Dx3D&autologin=NujEimMfx2BdEbf05UURx2Farx2Fx2BB6x2FAk674qx2FmKdISFw298nCU3snjcugx3Dx3D>

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