



Massachusetts
Department
of
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION

Water Street Fire & Explosion

Neighborhood Update

#1- November 29, 2006

Issued by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency and Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

Introduction

The US Environmental Protection Agency and Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection arrived at the scene of the Water Street fire and explosion in the early hours of the morning on November 22nd to support the response efforts. Both EPA and MassDEP continue to work closely with the Town of Danvers and other state and federal agencies to address the area impacted by the explosion.

Now that the fire suppression activities have been completed, EPA and MassDEP are turning their focus toward addressing the chemical and hazardous waste materials resulting from the explosion. Below is an update on the work that is getting underway. EPA and MassDEP will continue to keep you informed of our progress through periodic updates. Further information on this site is also available on the World Wide Web at www.epa.gov/ne/danvers

Air Monitoring

While actions were being taken to suppress last week's fire, EPA, MassDEP, and other environmental workers coordinated both air monitoring and water sampling to identify what types of contaminants were being released into the local environment, and to inform decision makers about potential risks being posed to the local community and emergency responders.

EPA and MassDEP both supplied laboratory analysis services in support of the air monitoring and water sampling to quickly identify if any contamination was posing short term (acute) risks to people. Direct reading air monitoring equipment deployed by EPA did not indicate elevated levels of chemicals of concern, nor did downwind air samples collected and analyzed by MassDEP personnel indicate elevated levels of chemicals of concern.

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Returning to Your Home

EPA and MassDEP will continue to work closely with state and local officials to ensure that you have all the information you need to protect yourself from any potential environmental hazards. If upon returning to your home, you observe household hazardous waste materials, such as paint thinners, that have been tipped over and spilled, or any oil leaking around your home heating oil storage tank, please contact the MassDEP representative listed at the end of this update.

What to Expect Going Forward

EPA and MassDEP will continue to monitor the air around the site of the fire and explosion for dust and potential contaminants. In addition, dust suppression measures will be taken to ensure that site activities do not impact the air quality of residents in the vicinity of the work area. Measures will also be taken to ensure that contaminated materials are not tracked beyond the work area.

The first phase of work involves securing the site, including locating and securing any drums or tanks that may be leaking.

Concurrent with securing the site, EPA, working with MassDEP, will identify the extent of the area where hazardous materials have come to be located as a result of the explosion. This investigation of the current environmental and public health conditions at the site will be used to formulate a plan of action and prioritize our forthcoming work. We will summarize the results of the investigation and outline our plan of action in the next neighborhood update.

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The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and Mass Public Health officials reviewed the field data and issued the following joint health statement on Thursday, November 23rd after reviewing the data:

“Ambient air samples collected by EPA during the late afternoon of Wednesday, November 22, demonstrated few detections, if any. All results were well below any available health guidelines. Based on a review by ATSDR and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, these data do not present any health concerns related to chemical exposures to residents returning to the neighborhood impacted by the fire.”

EPA and MassDEP will continue to monitor the air during the ongoing activities. To ensure protection of public health federal, state and local health officials will continue to provide a detailed review of the field data to evaluate any public health impact for Danvers residents.

Water Sampling

EPA also collected surface water samples from the firefighting run off and detected elevated levels of methyl ethyl ketone, alcohols and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). In addition, water samples obtained in the Waters, Crane, Porter and Danvers rivers were analyzed by MassDEP and found to contain methyl ethyl ketone and several other volatile organic compounds, though at concentrations well below levels of concern. All of these compounds were expected to disperse quickly in the water column.

Due to the elevated compounds detected in the run off water and the heavy rain at the site, environmental responders constructed containment berms to minimize contamination to surface waters by utilizing vacuum trucks, which collected the water from the bermed areas.

Additional water samples collected at outfall locations and on the Danvers River are still being analyzed for VOCs, alcohols, metals and semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs). An assessment of the environmental impacts to the river is forthcoming.

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On-site workers will be wearing personal protective gear while performing their jobs. This level of protection, which includes impermeable white suits and possibly respirators, is required by federal laws.

EPA and MassDEP will issue periodic updates to keep you informed of activities at the site.

Project Contacts

US EPA

Mike Nalipinski, On Scene Coordinator
Telephone: 617-780-1115

Angela Bonarrigo, Community Relations
Telephone: 617-918-1034
Email: bonarrigo.angela@epa.gov

MassDEP

John Fitzgerald, On Scene Coordinator
Telephone: 978-694-3308
Email: john.j.fitzgerald@state.ma.us

Mass Department of Public Health

Michael Feeney
Director, Emergency Response / Indoor Air Program
Telephone: 617-624-5757
Email: mike.feeney@state.ma.us

Town of Danvers

Peter Mirandi
Director of Public Health
Town Hall Office - 1 Sylvan Street
Telephone: 978-777-0001 ext 3025
Email: pmirandi@mail.danvers-ma.org