

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, REGION 3
DELAWARE, MARYLAND, PENNSYLVANIA, VIRGINIA, WEST VIRGINIA AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



BUTLER MINE TUNNEL
Pittston, PA
DECEMBER 2011
EPA RESPONDS TO SEVERE WEATHER



SUMMARY

EPA believes that there is a potential for an oil flush out from the Butler Mine Tunnel to the Susquehanna River during periods of high rainfall in the area. In the last few years there have been several such episodes, none of which have resulted in a flush-out.

Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee each occurred during late summer 2011, and these severe weather events brought significant rainfall to the area near the Butler Mine Tunnel Site (BMT), located in Luzerne County.

During such events, response contractors monitor computer modeled flow from Tunnel (based on rainfall), take measurements of the local rainfall and the actual flow from the mouth of the Tunnel. If an oil flush out is expected or actually occurs contractors are prepared to deploy the Butler Mine Tunnel response system. This system is pre-staged and ready for use.

HURRICANE IRENE

Hurricane Irene brought 3.7 inches of rain in approximately 24 hours. The maximum flow from the BMT, modeled using local rainfall amounts, was 32 million gallons per day (MGD).

Response contractors performed observations at the BMT outfall to the Susquehanna River from August 27 through August 29, 2011. There was no oil flush out from the BMT.

A sample of BMT water was collected at the outfall on August 29, and did not reveal evidence of elevated contaminant concentrations.

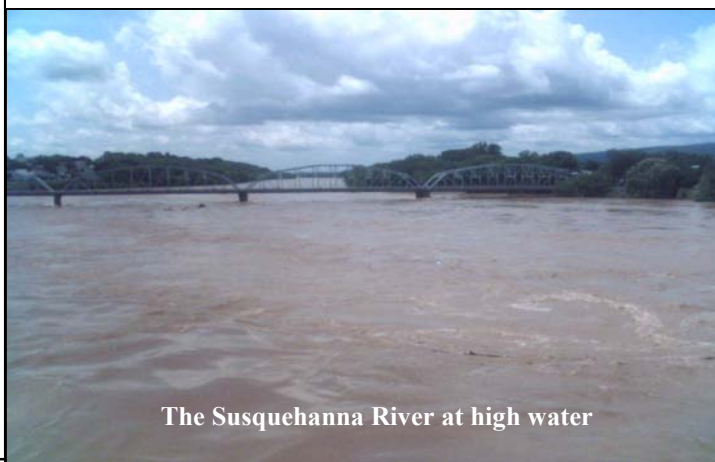
TROPICAL STORM LEE

Tropical Storm Lee brought 4.5 inches of rain over the course of several days.

The maximum flow from the BMT, modeled using local rainfall amounts, was 41 MGD. EPA, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), and response contractors performed observations at the BMT outfall from September 7, 2011 to September 16, 2011.

There was not an identified oil flush out from the BMT, although a petroleum sheen was identified for several hours by a PADEP observer on September 9, 2011 in a flooded railroad bed down river from the BMT outfall. EPA does not believe that this sheen was an oil flush out from the Butler Mine Tunnel. By comparison, the oil flush outs which occurred in 1979 and 1985 from the Butler Mine Tunnel, caused 35 and 50-mile oil slicks on the Susquehanna River, respectively.

A sample of BMT water was collected at the outfall on September 16, 2011 and did not reveal evidence of elevated contaminant concentrations.



The Susquehanna River at high water

A BRIEF SITE HISTORY

The Butler Mine Tunnel, located in Pittston, was constructed in the 1930s to provide mine drainage for an estimated five-square-mile area of underground coal mines. This tunnel drains into the Susquehanna River.

In 1979 and 1985, an oily discharge coming from the tunnel created an oil slick on the Susquehanna River.

The source of the oil was traced to illegal dumping at the High Way Auto Station (HWAS) borehole.

The HWAS borehole was found to drain into the 5-square miles of underground mine areas for which drainage is provided by the Butler Mine Tunnel.

The HWAS borehole is located approximately 3.5 miles from the outfall of the Butler Mine Tunnel into the Susquehanna River.

Approximately 25,000 people live within a five-mile radius of the site, and approximately 1,400 people live within the boundaries of the Butler Mine Tunnel site.

For more information about the site, please visit:
<http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/super/sites/PAD980508451/index.htm>

EPA ON SCENE DURING TROPICAL STORM LEE



EPA On-Scene Coordinator Inspects the Site



The Susquehanna River at high water observed from shore

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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