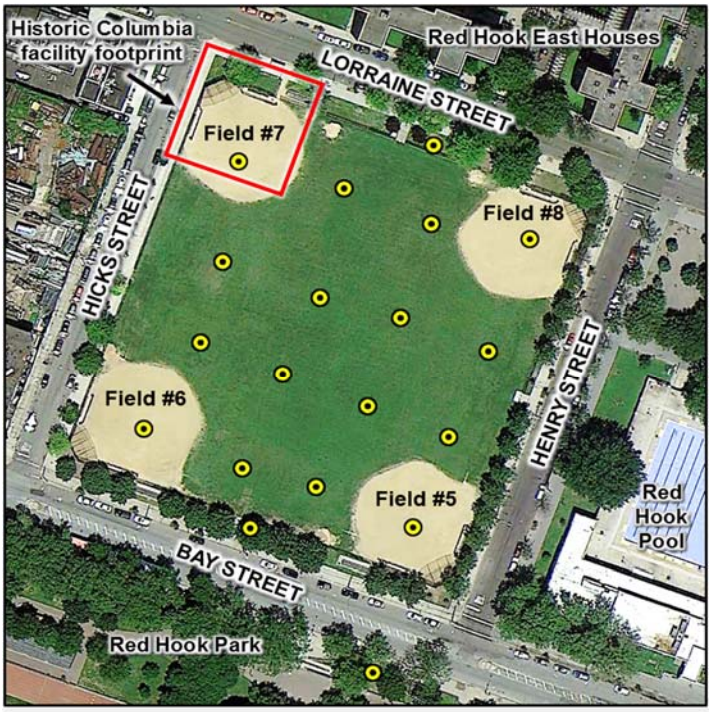
EPA Investigation of Historic Columbia Lead Facility: Red Hook Ball Fields Closing, Cleanup Required

Community Update No. 3 **April/May 2015**



A view of EPA's March 2015 sampling locations at the ball fields.

PUBLIC MEETING:
Monday, May 4th, 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM
Miccio Center Gymnasium
110 West 9th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11231

WHAT IS SECONDARY LEAD SMELTING?
Secondary lead smelting plants refine scrap or used lead materials into metallic lead of a higher purity. Such materials can include the lead plates from batteries, lead pipe or metal sheets that contain lead.

Secondary smelting can be responsible for releasing lead into the surrounding environment through lead fume emissions. Lead dust and smoke can be released during the smelting process, and slag contaminated with lead may be left over after the smelting process.

WHY IS LEAD A PROBLEM?
Lead is a toxic metal that was used for many years in paint and leaded gasoline. Lead poisoning can cause a number of harmful health effects, particularly in children under the age of six.

Exposure to lead in soil can occur when children play in the dirt and put their hands or dusty toys in their mouths. Lead can also get into your body by breathing or swallowing lead dust, or by eating soil containing lead.

WHY ARE BALL FIELDS 5-8 CLOSING?
In March 2015, as part of an ongoing investigation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) collected soil samples from the block where the Columbia Smelting and Refining Works (Columbia) facility once stood, as well as several other athletic fields and other areas of Red Hook Park.

The results of this more recent round of sampling showed elevated lead levels in surface soils throughout ball fields #5, 6, 7 and 8. Lead levels throughout the block are higher than expected based on previous sampling results. These fields, which are currently closed for grass maintenance, will remain closed throughout the 2015 season and until cleanup actions can be completed.

WHY DID EPA SAMPLE THE BALL FIELDS?
During the 1920s and 1930s, several metal companies, including the Columbia secondary smelting facility, operated on the corner of Hicks and Lorraine Streets. By 1940, the building was demolished. The block then became four ball fields and two cricket courts which are part of Red Hook Park.

EPA has been investigating these ball fields, and other areas nearby, to find out if lead from the old Columbia facility is in the soil. Once all the areas with lead from Columbia are identified, a soil cleanup will be planned.

ONGOING INVESTIGATION
Sampling of ball fields #5 – 8 has been completed. Sampling results for other athletic fields and other areas throughout Red Hook Park beyond Henry and Bay Streets did not show similarly elevated levels of lead in the surface soils. As a result, these areas currently remain open for public use. As a precaution, however, EPA will collect more samples from the following four fields by early May: the single ball field on Bay Street (#9), the two soccer/football fields at the intersection of Bay and Clinton Streets (#2 and #6), and the picnic areas surrounding the turf field (#1) along Bay Street between Clinton and Court Streets.

If you would like information about the site please contact:

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If you would like information on other environmental concerns or the Superfund hazardous waste program contact:

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Visit the EPA's website at:
www.epa.gov/region2/superfund/removal/columbia

CLEANUP PLANS

A cleanup of the impacted ball fields, and any other areas with contamination from the Columbia facility, will be conducted by the EPA or the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) to protect public health. Planning for and designing the cleanup actions may take at least a year.

HOW WILL I GET UPDATES AND THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION?

EPA and NYC Parks will provide updates on the status of additional sampling and cleanup efforts to the community in various ways, including fact sheets and public information sessions where EPA will be available to explain the sampling results and answer questions. The first public meeting will be held on May 4th.

WHAT DID THE INITIAL SITE INVESTIGATION FIND?

In October 2014, the EPA initially took soil samples from the ball fields and several surrounding areas, including the Red Hook East Houses. The soil samples were analyzed and the results showed:

- elevated lead levels were found in many locations at different soil depths throughout the area that was sampled;
- the highest lead levels in soil samples were more than an inch below the surface of the ground;
- soil samples taken from near the footprint of the former facility and along Henry Street contained lead which probably came from emissions from the former Columbia facility;
- soil samples taken from grassy fenced areas within Red Hook East Houses showed elevated lead levels unrelated to the Columbia site, but residents aren't likely to come in contact with the elevated lead unless they dig into the ground surface; and
- additional sampling at the Red Hook East Houses is not necessary at this time.

The March 2015 sampling was conducted to identify the extent of the contamination from Columbia that was detected at the ball fields in October 2014, and limited sampling was done in other fields. The April/May 2015 sampling will include more extensive sampling of other fields within the park.

SIMPLE STEPS TO REDUCE YOUR LEAD EXPOSURE

The following steps are recommended to reduce your potential exposure to lead contamination that may be present in urban soils.

- Remove shoes at the door before entering your home to prevent tracking in any dirt that may be on your shoes. Clean the bottom of your shoes with a wet wipe or paper towel.
- Wash your hands and face after visiting these ball fields and always before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- Avoid digging into or disturbing soil below the surface of the ball fields.