Maryland Department of the Environment

FACTS ABOUT:

W.R. GRACE & COMPANY SITE

Site Location

This site is located at 5500 Chemical Road in Baltimore City, on a peninsula between Curtis Creek and Curtis Bay. The site has been involved in the production of agricultural and industrial chemicals since 1910. During WWII, the site was involved in the Manhattan Project.

The W.R. Grace / Grace Davison Chemical Division, Curtis Bay Facility is located on an industrialized peninsula in South Baltimore, and consists of 260 acres owned by W.R. Grace. The property is bordered on the north by Curtis Bay, on the west by Curtis Creek, on the east by the Patapsco River, and on the south by the Baltimore City Municipal Landfill.

Site History

There were both active and inactive waste disposal areas on-site. There is an inactive waste disposal area that was used to dispose of industrial, process and construction waste. There is also an inactive radiation disposal area. This area was used to dispose of waste from a pilot plant process in the 1960s. Currently in use is the wastewater plant sludge cell. Wastewater from the Waste Water Treatment Plant is directed to Herring Pond and the sludge is sent to a wastewater plant sludge cell. There is an NPDES outfall which extends from Herring Pond to Curtis Bay.

At one point, there was approximately 704,000 cubic feet of radioactive waste that had been disposed of in the radioactive waste disposal area. In 1992, an official from MDE's Division of Radiological Health stated the site had been remediated to an acceptable point for any type of use.

Chemical processing has been performed at the Grace site since 1909. In the early 1940's, Grace produced agricultural fertilizers and industrial chemicals. During World War II, the facility manufactured explosives and participated in Manhattan Engineer District activities. In 1955, Rare Earths, Inc., the predecessor of Grace, entered into a contract with the Atomic Energy Commission to extract radioactive thorium and other rare earth elements from monazite sand that was shipped to the Curtis Bay plant; the thorium processing was terminated at the Grace site in 1956. From 1912 until 1979, all waste material generated at the plant was disposed of in areas to the east of the plant proper.

The Grace site is one of 22 sites remaining nationwide that DOE had determined requires either remedial action or further investigation. The historical documents on the Grace site indicate that areas within the site either were, or may have been, impacted.

Environmental Investigation and Action

Groundwater, surface water and soil samples were taken which indicated both organic and inorganic contamination of groundwater at Well #2 and the Herring Pond monitoring well. A sample from the sludge cell indicated low levels of metals and higher levels of arsenic.

During FY 2013 the Baltimore District Corps of Engineers (COE) oversaw remedial efforts in the field and provided technical assistance to the property owner with respect to a settlement with the remediation contractor. The current remediation efforts have been completed and the contractor is preparing a Closure Report for the work.

Current Status

COE plans for FY 2014 included supporting the owner in preparing a request for proposal and selecting a contractor to complete the remaining remedial action work required to implement a final status survey.