

Cleanup at toxic plume's ground zero

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EPA begins 20-year groundwater remediation at LAI, while 100s of tons of tainted soil are still to be excavated from former PJS industrial site

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Even as the federal Environmental Protection Agency oversees the construction in Caroline Avenue Park of a pump-and-treat facility to remove volatile organic compounds from the groundwater beneath a swath of western Port Jefferson and from the Old Mill Pond and Old Mill Creek, a similar facility is already operating uphill from the village, near the original source of the contamination.

Built atop a rise on the southern part of the 125-acre former Lawrence Aviation Industries site in Port Jefferson Station, that pump-and-treat facility began operation in September, EPA Project Manager Maria Jon said during a tour of the plant last week.

The plant, which extracts polluted groundwater from two EPA-dug wells on the LAI site, is designed to be able to handle a maximum of 210 gallons per minute. It is currently operating at 150 gpm while EPA officials make adjustments for optimal efficiency.

The treatment plant removes carcinogenic VOCs from the groundwater by an air-stripping process, then pumps the treated, clean water back into the groundwater by means of five intrusion wells also located on the LAI property about 100 yards from the plant.

EPA Section Chief for Remediation Sal Badalamenti, former EPA project manager for the Lawrence Aviation cleanup, told The Port Times Record last week during a tour of the treatment plant that the new facility has been operating without any problems.

Inside the modest main room, about the size of a two-car garage, are the air strippers and water intake filters designed to remove any metal or stones that may get pumped in with the water. From an adjacent control room the entire operation can be monitored on a computer screen. No full-time personnel are currently assigned to the plant, Badalamenti said, which can also be monitored and controlled remotely.



The EPA's on-site pump and treat plant at Lawrence Aviation will function nonstop for 20 years to remove carcinogens from the groundwater. Photos by D. Willinger. [\(click for larger version\)](#)

The air used during the stripping process is clean when vented through the roof at a rate of 2,400 cubic feet per minute, EPA officials said. Inside the plant an automatic VOC detector constantly monitors the air quality.

The plan for remediation of Lawrence Aviation involves the groundwater treatment both on-site near the original source of the pollution and in

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The foundation for the EPA's water treatment plant in Port Jefferson clearly shows the size of the facility's footprint. Caroline Avenue ball field is visible in the background. ([click for larger version](#))

Port Jefferson village near Old Mill Pond where the plume has migrated, surfacing in the waters of the pond as well as in the creek that links it to the harbor. Both plants are expected to operate 24/7 for 20 years in order to completely remediate the plume.

In addition, soil contaminated by PCBs has been excavated from the former industrial site and hauled out of state to a facility certified to accept that type of pollution.

Jon said an additional 200 tons of PCB-contaminated soil must still be trucked off-site, as well as some 120 tons of lead-tainted soil discovered last year during the construction of the intrusion wells for the on-site water treatment

plant. That work is scheduled to begin the week of Dec. 6, EPA spokesman John Senn confirmed this week.

The area where the contaminated soil must be removed is just steps away from a state Department of Transportation right-of-way slated to become a part of the local greenbelt hiking and biking trail, EPA officials said.

Gerald Cohen, 76, former head of Lawrence Aviation, was sentenced in 2009 to one year and one day in prison and ordered to pay \$105,816 in restitution after he pleaded guilty to one count in the federal indictment of him on pollution charges. At the time an EPA spokesperson said "enforcement actions [against Cohen] are ongoing to recoup the costs of the cleanup," which EPA officials estimate in excess of \$24 million. The on-site water treatment plant itself was built with \$5 million in stimulus funds, EPA officials said.

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