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Three Corning parks have contaminated soil: What to know about using the sites, cleanup



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The Leader

Published 5:05 a.m. ET Sept. 2, 2022 | Updated 3:11 p.m. ET Sept. 2, 2022

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation says environmental cleanup is necessary at Corning's McKinney Park and William Street Park, which includes nearby Hillvue Park, after initial soil sampling showed chemical contaminants alongside ash, brick and glass materials.

It's unclear yet who will foot the bill for cleanup at those sites, and the targeted sites may expand. The DEC is currently evaluating Denison Park, where it says ash, brick and glass were also detected in soil samples.

The nature of the contaminants identified by the DEC is largely similar to what was reported at sites where Corning Inc. has agreed to conduct cleanup work, including the Houghton Plot neighborhood in the city.

Corning Inc. officials said they haven't seen anything from DEC connecting the company to what was found in the parks.

DEC said determining responsibility is the next step of their process. Anyone identified as a responsible party will be given an opportunity to perform the remedial investigation under DEC's oversight, according to DEC spokesperson Andrea Pedrick. If the responsible party declines, the investigation will be performed by DEC using state environmental cleanup funds.

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“Corning Inc. and its engineering and construction contractors continue to diligently, efficiently and safely complete investigation, remediation and restoration work on properties where information exists connecting Corning Inc. to the property,” said Corning Inc. spokesperson Gabrielle Bailey. “No such information has been provided to Corning Inc. by the NYSDEC for these parks.”

Following the completion of the remedial investigation of the three parks, a report will be published and released to the public, according to DEC.

The parks can continue to be used by the public, DEC officials said. While soil collected beneath the surface contained arsenic, cadmium, and lead above the level allowed in residential areas, contact with contaminants in those soils is unlikely unless people dig into the ground there.

Much of the soil in the parks is covered by grass, along with materials such as mulch or wood chips in the playground portions, according to the DEC. Both grass and mulch provide a cover that prevents contact with the soils beneath.

However, people can reduce the chance of exposure to these contaminants by taking reasonable and practical steps to minimize direct and repeated contact with bare soils, particularly by young children, according to DEC. Children and adults should wash their hands after activities in the parks.

Crews paid for by Corning Inc. continue soil excavation and restoration in Houghton Plot, which began in 2018, Bailey said. Corning Inc. expects to have the work in that area completed by the end of 2023, depending on the timing of DEC approvals and property owners agreeing to remediation.

Corning Inc. entered into a consent agreement with DEC in July 2014 to address layers of target fill containing ash, brick and glass that contained contaminants, including lead, cadmium or arsenic, at levels above state limits in the Houghton Plot neighborhood.

The Houghton family, the founders of Corning Inc., owned the area when it was an undeveloped piece of farmland.

Officials said workers from what was Corning Flint Glass Works and other area glassmaking companies dumped waste glass and ceramics at the site until the early 20th century, when the area was covered with topsoil and homes were built.

