

Site History

American Quality Fibers was a paper and plastics recycling facility that operated from 1986 until it went bankrupt. The current owner of the property is Winnebago County, which acquired the property through an In Rem tax deed in 1997. Prior to 1986, the site was most recently used as a warehouse for a chemical company and as a drum refinishing operation.

Three separate site assessments have been performed at the American Quality Fibers site since 1996. Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer, and Associates, Inc. performed a Partial Phase I Environmental Assessment. The report indicated that the site was occupied by a wood truss building used for auto storage according to a 1926 Sanborn map. The 1926 to 1944 Sanborn map revealed a chemical warehouse and a chemical storage building. Two acid tanks were shown on the map on the south side of the property. During an inspection of the site, two main points of potential environmental concern were observed outside of the building. A pair of vent and fill pipes were observed along the south wall of the building near the west corner, and distressed vegetation and numerous old drum lids and bungs were observed outside the southeast corner of the building. Interviews conducted during the site assessment revealed that a large slurry tank and an aboveground storage tank existed inside the building. Spills were reportedly rinsed down two floor drains inside the building. Ashland Chemical reportedly used the northern portion of the property to transfer and fill drums. No soil or groundwater sampling was performed as part of this assessment.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) performed an assessment in 1998. As a part of this assessment, four soil borings were performed and six surface soil samples were collected on-site. Groundwater monitoring wells were constructed in three of the borings. Results of the assessment showed elevated soil and groundwater contamination on the property. Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) including ketones, chlorinated compounds, and petroleum hydrocarbons were found in the soil and groundwater at MW1, located in the northern, unpaved portion of the property. Less severe groundwater contamination was found in monitoring wells MW2 and MW3, located on the south edge of the property. Elevated levels of lead contamination were found in the soil on the south end of the property. The WDNR recommended additional investigation of the property.

In March and April of 1999, the EPA performed a site assessment. Twenty-seven surface soil samples were collected at the site, and the three existing monitoring wells were sampled. Drain and floor samples were also collected. During the first sampling event in March, soil samples were collected from along the eastern and



southern edges of the property at 40-foot intervals, from the small unpaved area in the center of the site, and from background locations across Railroad Street. A second sampling event in April included sampling from under the northern section of pavement, from under the warehouse foundation and from the drain inside the warehouse. Analytical laboratory results indicated elevated levels of arsenic, barium, chromium, lead, and mercury in the soil at the American Quality Fibers site. Toxicity characteristic leaching procedure standards were not exceeded in any of the samples; however, total lead levels in three of the soil samples were over the Wisconsin Industrial Residual Contaminant Level of 500 Part per million (ppm). The groundwater sampling confirmed the elevated levels of VOC contamination in MW1 on-site. The samples collected from the drain and floor were also contaminated with lead.

From November 2000 through June 2002, OMNNI coordinated the installation of 32 soil borings at the site. Groundwater monitoring wells were installed in 12 of the borings. Piezometers were installed in nine of the borings.

Analytical test results indicated that the extent of soil and groundwater contamination at the site had not been fully defined. VOCs had been detected above enforcement standards in the groundwater at all of the monitoring wells and piezometers at the site except for the background monitoring well (MW4) and piezometer (P1). Levels of lead near the southeast corner of the building and levels of tetrachloroethene and trichloroethene in the suspected source area (the grassy area north of the building) had been determined to be hazardous based on toxicity characteristic leaching procedure. The investigation activities were documented in a soil and groundwater investigation report.

Winnebago County applied for and received three site assessment grants from the WDNR. The grants were used to remove an underground storage tank, evaluate asbestos removal requirements, identify lead-bearing paint, evaluate if concrete surfaces had been impacted by solvent and/or metal contamination, demolition of the building, and disposal of demolition material. The site assessment grants were also to be used to assist with soil and groundwater investigation under the former building footprint.

Winnebago County also applied for and received an urban forestry grant from the WDNR. The grant was used to assist in the purchase, planting, and initial monitoring of 280 trees. The trees are being used in the phytoremediation of the contaminated soil and groundwater at the site. The grant was also used to provide information to the community about the phytoremediation process.