

Questions & Answers Regarding Environmental Studies at Elmira High School

What is the history of the Elmira High School site?

The Elmira High School (formerly the Southside High School) property located at 777 South Main Street, Elmira, has a long history of industrial and manufacturing use. The Elmira High School property was once part of a larger 83-acre parcel where B.W. Payne & Sons produced high-speed steam engines from approximately 1887—1909, followed by Morrow Manufacturing Co., which made drill chucks, machine parts, and a line of tools at the site from approximately 1909—1935. Subsequently, Remington Rand Corp. manufactured typewriter parts from 1936—1972. Thereafter, Westinghouse Electric Corporation utilized the property mainly for warehousing from 1974—1977. It is believed that Westinghouse Electric Corporation deeded the property to the Southern Tier Economic Growth Agency in 1977. The Southside High School was then constructed on the northern portion of the original parcel, opening in 1979.

What led to environmental studies being conducted at Elmira High School, and what studies have been conducted to date?

The Elmira High School property has been the subject of multiple environmental investigations since the late 1990's.

In 1995, fuel oil contamination was found on nearby Miller Pond, located east of the Elmira High School site. A New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) investigation revealed a petroleum contaminated plume approximately fifteen (15) feet below grade, extending from underneath the Elmira High School property toward Miller Pond. The fuel oil contamination was addressed with bioremediation through the installation of an oxygen-injection system at the Elmira High School property that continues to operate today. Groundwater samples collected since the system was installed suggest that concentrations of diesel range organic compounds have stabilized and degradation of contaminant compounds has occurred.

In April 2000, the Board of Education brought to the attention of the New York State Department of Health (DOH) community concerns about the number of cancers diagnosed among current and former students of the High School. In response to these concerns, the DOH and DEC conducted a joint investigation from 2000—2003 of soil, groundwater, soil vapor, and indoor air at the Elmira High School, as well as nearby accessible areas to determine whether a health risk existed. A public health assessment that summarized environmental data, evaluated public health implications, and provided recommendations for specific health related actions pertaining to the Elmira High School property was completed by the DOH, in conjunction with U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and results were published in a 2003 DOH Health Consultation Report.

The 2003 DOH Health Consultation Report concluded that environmental conditions at Elmira High School, including indoor air quality and surface soils, pose no apparent public health hazard. While sub-surface soil samples revealed impacted soils in certain areas of the site from prior industrial uses, including soils contaminated with PCBs, the DOH concluded that the general public was not exposed to the impacted sub-surface soils. Additionally, because municipal water that meets all State and Federal drinking water standards is provided to Elmira High School, direct contact with contaminated groundwater was not a concern. Recommendations provided by the DOH Health Consultation Report included developing and implementing a soils management plan to provide measures to minimize the potential for human exposure to subsurface soils, and an indoor air quality action plan to address the potential of impacted soil vapor migrating into the High School building.

In 2009, an Environmental Management Plan was prepared by the Elmira City School District with the assistance of its environmental consultant, Sterling Environmental Engineering, P.C., with review and input by the DOH and DEC. The purpose of the Environmental Management Plan was to organize environmental data, maintain engineering controls, and manage future site development in order to reduce potential exposures by construction personnel, students, and the general community to contaminated soil, groundwater, and soil vapor. The components of the Environmental Management Plan include a Soil Management Plan, Indoor Air Quality Action Plan, Groundwater Management Plan, and an Operations, Monitoring and Maintenance Plan for Engineering Controls. Since 2009, Annual Certification Reports have been prepared by Elmira City School District's environmental consultant in accordance with the Environmental Management Plan.

In July 2014, the Elmira City School District authorized Unisys Corporation (Unisys), as the successor to prior owner and operator Remington Rand, to access the Elmira High School property for the purpose of evaluating environmental conditions at the site in connection with an Order on Consent and Administrative Settlement that Unisys entered into with the DEC. The DEC and DOH approved work plans prepared by Unisys concerning the environmental characterization studies at Elmira High School that are ongoing.

What is the current status of environmental study activities and response actions at Elmira High School?

Since 2014, Unisys has conducted soil sampling at the Elmira High School as part of the ongoing site characterization process. Representatives of the Elmira City School District, DEC, DOH, and Unisys met in 2015 to discuss the results of the soil sampling, which confirmed that indoor air, surface soil, and groundwater quality conditions are consistent with the prior findings of the DOH and DEC from 2003. However, all parties agreed that further evaluation of the Elmira High School property should be conducted, largely because PCBs were found to be present in soils in several areas, similar to previous findings. As a precautionary measure to mitigate the potential exposure to PCBs, Unisys installed temporary protective cover systems over non-paved areas with elevated PCB

concentrations. Additionally, the Elmira City School Districted temporarily restricted access to other grassed areas and athletic fields where PCBs were found. Unisys also installed a sub-slab depressurization system (SSDS) in a portion of “F” wing (in the northwest corner of the Elmira High School) as a precautionary measure to further reduce the potential for contaminated soil vapors to migrate to indoor air. The “F” wing SSDS is similar to those that had already been operating under the gymnasium, science “K” wing, and the new cafeteria expansion, in accordance with the Environmental Management Plan. Indoor air testing in the “F” wing has confirmed that the SSDS system installed by Unisys is effectively reducing the potential for soil vapor intrusion to occur in that area.

Additional site characterization activities are anticipated to take place through the end of 2015, including more soil sampling and characterization of former drainage structures on the east and southeast portions of the Elmira High School property. Information collected will be summarized in reports and used to determine the need for any additional investigation or other cleanup activities to ensure that Elmira High School occupants are not being exposed to contaminants related to historic use of the site.

What is the role of Unisys Corporation with respect to environmental studies at Elmira High School, and what governmental agencies are providing oversight?

Unisys is the successor company to Remington Rand Inc. and Sperry Rand Corp., which owned the Elmira High School property from approximately 1936—1972 and manufactured typewriter parts thereon. Unisys entered into an Order on Consent and Administrative Settlement with the DEC concerning the Elmira High School property in 2014.

Unisys, with the assistance of its environmental consultant, Geosyntec Consultants, Inc., is conducting the ongoing site characterization work at the Elmira High School at no cost to the Elmira City School District or New York State. Project oversight is being conducted by DEC and DOH, as well as the New York State Education Department.

Unisys is also conducting environmental investigative work at nearby properties, including the former Scott Technologies site, former Sperry Remington site, and off-site waterways.

What are the health concerns with respect to substances discovered at Elmira High School?

Data collected to date, including that collected by Unisys since 2014, does not change the prior conclusions of involved governmental agencies that environmental conditions at Elmira High School pose no apparent public health hazard.

Prior assessments found that Elmira High School occupants were protected from potential exposure to elevated levels of chemicals related to the historic use of the site by the contemporary building or surface cover materials such as concrete slabs, pavement, imported soil, and grass. Additionally, prior assessments concluded that the heating,

ventilating, and air conditioning system (HVAC) at the Elmira High School reduced the risk of migration of contaminated soil vapor into the building's indoor air.

In connection with ongoing studies being conducted by Unisys, additional temporary protective cover systems have been added to non-paved areas of the site with elevated PCB concentrations. Unisys also installed a sub-slab depressurization system (SSDS) in the northwest corner of the Elmira High School to further reduce the potential for contaminated soil vapors to migrate to indoor air.

I am an ECSD parent or community member and have a question not answered here. How can I get my question answered?

Please put your question in writing and email our Public Information Coordinator at khall@elmiracityschools.com. Please include contact information and we will get back to you with as much information as possible. You can also call and leave your question with us at 607-735-3091, along with a phone number and/or email address where we can reach you.

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