

## Spills: Details of reports

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American LaFrance factory in Southport.

About 400 gallons flowed into an old storm water drainage system and made its way into nearby Coldbrook Creek, according to DEC reports.

■ 1980: A man reported oil floating on a holding pond on the American LaFrance property, 777 S. Main St., Southport. The pond drains into Coldbrook Creek. A month later, the DEC investigated the complaint and found no signs of contamination.

■ 1992: Soil and groundwater were contaminated when an unknown amount of gasoline leaked from an old 1,000-gallon underground gasoline tank on the former American LaFrance property adjacent to the school. Sixteen underground storage tanks, most of them containing some gasoline and diesel fuel, were later removed.

■ 1989: The state Department of Environmental Conservation listed the former Remington Rand property at 1021 S. Main St., Elmira, as an inactive hazardous waste site. The site is considered a potential environmental or public health hazard.

■ 1997: Workers discovered soil contaminated with diesel fuel after they had removed 500-gallon and 1,000-gallon underground storage tanks. The tanks were removed from the Elmira Fire Department fire station at 213 W. Miller St., about three blocks north of the school.

Health officials have said fuel contamination in the soil does not pose a health risk so long as a person does not come in direct contact with it.

"What you're finding is typical of giant industrial manufacturing sites," said Walter Hang, president of Toxics Targeting. "Heavy metals, tank leaks and PCBs are usually found anytime you have these gigantic industrial-scale operations for a decade or more."

That caucous parents such as Alan Cece, of Franklin Street in Elmira. Cece's son is scheduled to attend Southside High School in 2002.

"There's a lot of contamination in the area of the school," said Cece, 37, a computer network technician. "I'm not knowledgeable enough to know if it can affect your health, but given the current situation at Southside, this just adds to my concern."

"I really don't want to subject my kids to any more harm than I have to. How much more of a risk am I putting my kids in if they go to Southside, rather than EFA, Edison or Heschel?"

Before the 1970s, a time of few environmental laws, it was common for industrial wastes to be dumped on the ground, buried or burned.

The former Remington Rand Co., which made business machines on

the current school property, used to burn its damaged typewriters outside in giant bonfires, said Robert Schneider, 83, of Elmira, who used to work at the factory.

"They burned it way in the back of the property (near the railroad tracks) right out in the open," said Schneider, who did maintenance work at the factory from 1955 to 1957. "They'd throw the typewriters and (waste) wood into a big 20-foot-tall pile. Then they would throw lacquer thinner on it and set it on fire. They'd burn thousands of typewriters that way. They did it two or three times while I worked there."

The industrial wastes did more than pollute the immediate surroundings. Much of the waste spread out with the watershed and contaminated large areas or was dumped elsewhere, DEC records show.

The oil dumped from the transformers in 1975 was so thick that it formed clumps on the surface of Coldbrook Creek, according to a DEC report issued that year.

A former Remington Rand dump, about a mile south of the school, is undergoing cleanup to remove soil contaminated with PCBs, coal ash and chemical waste products from manufacturing.

The school is in an area that was home to heavy industrial manufacturing for more than 113 years. The Chemung Foundry, a different American LaFrance facility, Kennedy Valve, Remington Rand and the Pennsylvania Railroad car shops all had manufacturing facilities within six blocks of the school.

Despite the presence of factories, the amount of contamination is no greater than in most other industrial areas of the city, said Scott Rodabaugh, a DEC environmental engineer.

"We would expect to find more problems in industrial areas," Rodabaugh said. "You'd expect to find more spills and things like heavy metals (in the soil) and underground tanks."

That is exactly what was found during the 1999 cleanup of the former American LaFrance site, according to DEC documents.

The state is also cleaning up a plume of old fuel oil contamination 15 feet below ground, under the school and east of it, toward Miller Pond. The oil, thought to have leaked from old, buried storage tanks, doesn't pose a health hazard because there's no way for the public to come in contact with it, state officials say.

"Whenever you have a large industrial site, you have innumerable accidents and spills that happen day to day that create contamination," Hang said. "And over time that accumulates on site. And that's what you're seeing today."

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Sun, Apr 14, 2019