Message

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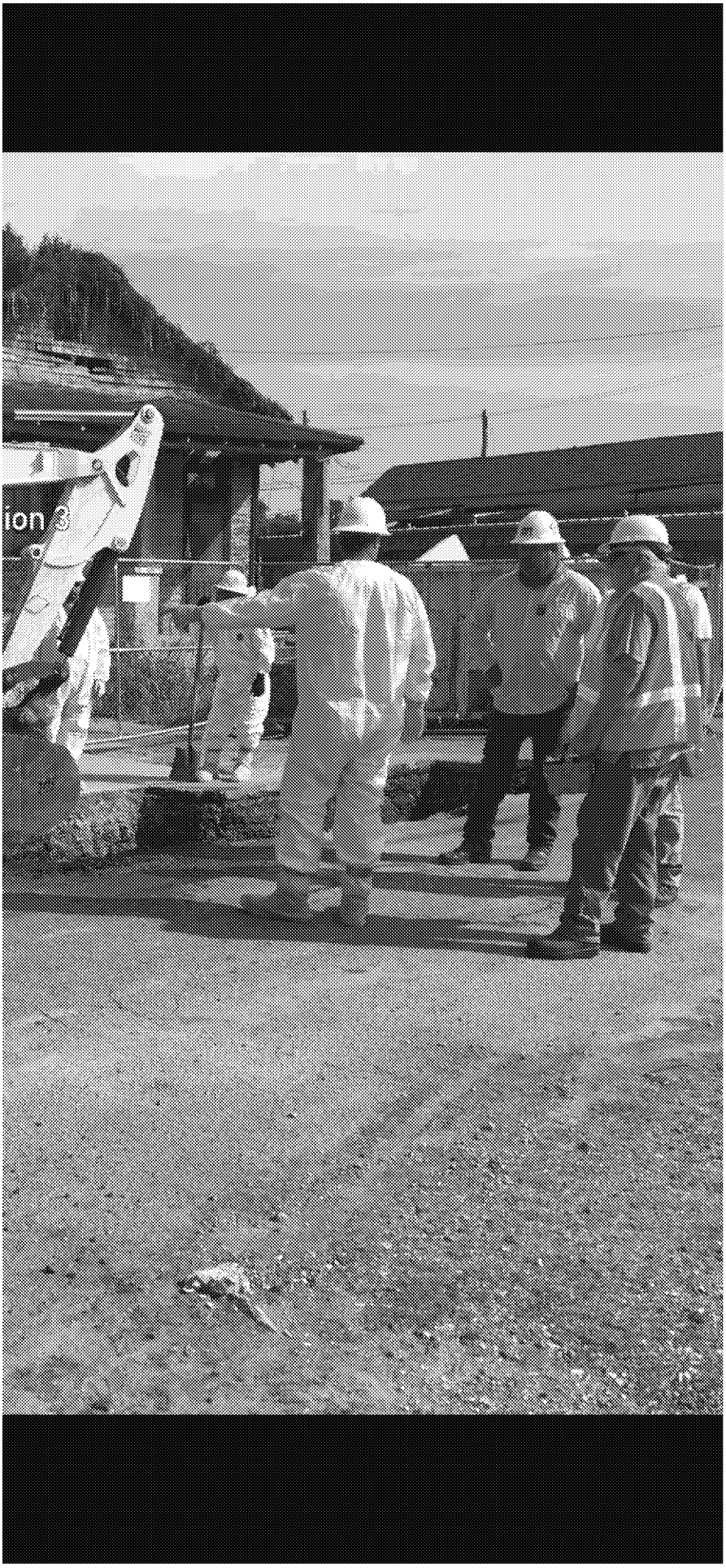
Sent: 6/5/2019 12:40:30 PM
To: Havlik, Carl [havlik.carl@epa.gov]; Balandran, Olivia-R [balandran.olivia-r@epa.gov]
Subject: Story of Lowerline site

Lowerline, New Orleans, LA — It was probably 70 years ago when the problem in the Gert Town neighborhood was created. At least that is when the City paved over the radioactive material in the middle of residential Lowerline Street. Radium-226 (Ra-226) is mixed in with the original oyster shells that made up the road. The records show that New Orleans originally paved the road in the late 1940s. That layer and another are clearly visible in the excavation, and no substantial amount of Ra-226 was found above the oyster shells. The hotspot was discovered when the Department of Energy (DOE) conducted a sweep of the area around the Superdome prior to the WWE wrestling event there a few years back. DOE informed the City of the situation. The City attempted to remove the hotspot but after removing the one spot that had been identified, there were several more areas of elevated radioactivity.

The City and State sought assistance from EPA. EPA's assessment showed elevated levels of gamma radiation over about half of the 3400 block of Lowerline. The activity was high enough that a quarterly allowable dose could have been achieved by an average of less than 40 minutes per day by standing or visiting in the street.

On-Scene Coordinator Greg Fife led the Removal Action. EPA excavated five areas on the street. To insure the safety of the residents, air samplers were deployed at the perimeters of the Site. Direct-read dosimeters were deployed along side. The EPA crew had several meters closely monitoring the radiation from the excavation and the special lock-tight transportation containers. About 100 cubic yards of soil was removed for disposal.

EPA combined with the City and State to inform the residents about the situation. The Community Relations Coordinator visited with residents at their homes, met with the congregation at the adjacent church and sent informational flyers.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EPA crews excavating Lowerline Street in New Orleans.