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EOC Spot Report: Chemical Spill, Charleston WV – Update #15

US Environmental Protection Agency

Report as of 1700 January 18, 2014

Overview: On January 10, the President approved an Emergency Declaration for the State of West Virginia after a chemical, 4-methylcyclohexanemethanol, (MCHM) leaked at a Freedom Industries chemical plant and into the Elk River in Charleston, WV. The spill occurred near the Kanawha Valley Water Treatment Plant which detected the chemical even after an increased carbon treatment effort was put in place. Freedom Industries is working to clean up the spill at the facility and in the river.

State, Local and other Federal Agency Actions: West Virginia water authorities issued a "Do Not Use Water Notice" for 10 counties and the President's Emergency Declaration covers eight counties. West Virginia American Water Company (WVAWC) customers were told not to use tap water for drinking, cooking, washing, or bathing. Water could be used for toilets and fire emergencies. When the incident originally occurred, it contaminated drinking water for 300,000 people.

EPA Region 3 Water Division reports that the West Virginia (WV) American Water Company has lifted drinking water restrictions in all water distribution zones with some exceptions. Precautionary boil water advisories are in place for several smaller groups of customers throughout the district after water storage tanks were depleted following excessive flushing activities.

Additionally, the WV American Water Company has not lifted the alert for three towns (Buffalo, Frazier's Bottom and Pliny). Water sampling results indicated additional flushing and sampling is required in this area. Once the system is fully restored, WV American Water Company will test the system at the parts per billion level to ensure non-detectable levels in the water.

Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO)continues to monitor the plume. Water from tributaries to the Ohio are diluting the MCHM to low concentrations. Louisville, KY Zorn intake peaked at 3.5 ppb.

Region 3 OSCs reported that MCHM was detected at 285 ppm in the water sample collected from the "seep" area at the northeastern end of the facility. The facility's contractor observed that the area had fluids with a rainbow-colored film. The color suggests that petroleum hydrocarbons are present. Since the fluids still contain MCHM, the facility will dig additional trenching to collect these fluids. The trenching operations will be delayed because the soils are near frozen at the surface. WVDEP plans to collect samples and analyze them for petroleum-related products. The facility will extend the boom 20 feet upstream in the river to ensure that the seeped material is captured.

Due to extremely wet soils on site, overnight operations were limited to monitoring the interceptor trench and pumping water from the trench into tanker trucks. As temperatures significantly dropped overnight, the volume of water that is emerging from the storm drain continues to reduce.

The WV Emergency Operations Center remains at Level I (Full Activation). The FEMA National Watch Center is at Normal Operations (Watch/Steady State). The FEMA Region III Regional Response Coordination Center remains at Level III (Partial Activation). An Interim Operating Facility is operational in Charleston, with a Federal Coordinating Officer, a Type-III Incident Management Assistance Team, and a FEMA Liaison in place.

EPA Action: EPA Region 3 visited the Poca facility to investigate staging operations of the MCHM-contaminated water. By observation and conversations with the facility staff, EPA found that four tanks were full with MCHM product, three tanks were full with MCHM-contaminated water, and one tank was full of product mixed with water.

Media Interest: High
http://www.wvgazette.com/News/201401170117
http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/01/17/company-files-for-bankruptcy-after-wva-chemical-spill/

The HQ EOC will continue to monitor and provide updates as needed.

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