West Lake Update

April 14, 2014

From Karl Brooks, Regional Administrator

My April 4, 2014, letter to Michael Rissman, General Counsel for Republic Services, outlined steps that EPA will order the potentially responsible parties (PRPs) to undertake in order to expedite construction of the isolation barrier.

My letter informed Mr. Rissman that the preliminary barrier design submitted by the PRPs does not meet the goal to separate all of the radiologically impacted material (RIM) from the Bridgeton Landfill subsurface smoldering event (SSE), nor does it present a feasible proven design that quickly can be implemented. EPA expects the PRPs to revise the design and promptly provide a work plan to EPA for review and comment.

My letter also informed the PRPs that the survey work to identify the best location for the barrier has progressed enough to warrant pre-construction activities. EPA will soon issue an order which will outline a schedule for starting those activities shortly after May 1, 2014.

The barrier design and work plans must include a clear plan to manage the excavated material. The work plans must ensure that excavated material has been screened for RIM before it is transported for appropriate disposal or storage.

As always, EPA is taking active steps to ensure that the public remains protected from the contaminants at the site. The steps outlined in my letter, such as requiring an air monitoring system, the development of a bird mitigation plan, and expediting the construction of the isolation barrier, will serve to ensure that the public remains protected as we continue to work towards a final remedy at the site. Read the full text of my letter at www.epa.gov/region7/cleanup/west_lake_landfill/pdf/rissman-letter-04-04-14.pdf

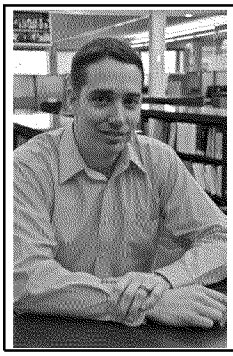
Defining the Terms: Remedial vs. Removal

The Superfund law provides for two main categories of cleanup actions: removal actions and remedial actions. The primary differences between the two relate to the urgency of the threat to human health or the environment, and the extent of cleanup required.

Removal actions typically address more immediate threats involving actions that can be implemented more quickly than remedial actions. Some examples of removal actions include excavating contaminated soil, erecting a security fence, or stabilizing a berm, dike, or impoundment. Removal actions may also include taking abandoned drums or containers to a proper disposal facility to prevent the release of hazardous substances into the environment. Removal actions may occur at National Priorities List (NPL) or non-NPL sites.

Remedial actions address long term threats at NPL sites through a comprehensive process involving environmental studies, engineering design, and construction. Remedial actions may remain in place for many years in order to address the threats posed by contamination. Some examples of remedial actions include groundwater extraction and treatment systems, soil excavation, soil treatment and disposal, or capping contaminated soil. At sites where the selected remedial action results in contaminants remaining in place (as in a capping remedy), an operation and maintenance program is required to ensure the remedy remains protective over the long term. In addition, those sites undergo reviews of the implemented remedy every five years to ensure that it is still protective.

The West Lake Landfill Superfund Site is on the NPL, and EPA is addressing the site under Superfund's remedial authorities. However, EPA plans to use its removal authorities for installation of the isolation barrier in order to implement that action more expeditiously. Longer term actions to address threats associated with the wastes at the site and groundwater impacts will be conducted under remedial authorities. Ensuring the public's protection from the contaminants remains EPA Region 7's number one priority at the site.



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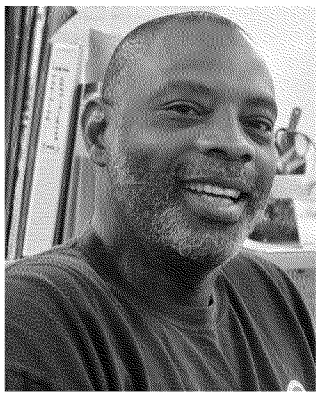
Meet James Johnson



James Johnson

James Johnson has been with EPA since 2006, and an On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) since 2009. James is one of the primary OSCs assigned to the West Lake Superfund Site and conducts oversight of the potentially responsible parties' (PRPs') on-site environmental work related to the site. Specifically, James will oversee the upcoming off-site air monitoring prior to and during construction of the isolation barrier.

Prior to joining EPA, James worked for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment as an Environmental Scientist and Radiation Control Inspector, and for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources as an Environmental Specialist. In addition, he is a retired Military Public Health Officer for the U.S. Air Force Reserves, where he managed occupational health and safety programs.

James has a dual bachelor's degree in Life Sciences and Gerontology, a Certified Public Manager's Certificate, and a master's degree in Environmental Management.