



# News Release

Region 2 - New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

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## **EPA Adds Radiation Site in Ridgewood Queens, New York to the Superfund List**

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(New York, N.Y. – May 8, 2014) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has added the Wolff-Alport Chemical Company site in the Ridgewood section of Queens, New York to the federal Superfund list of hazardous waste sites. The soil and nearby sewers were contaminated by radioactive material from past industrial activities at the site. Testing indicates that there is no immediate threat to nearby residents, employees or customers of businesses in the affected area along Irving and Cooper Avenues. Since exposure to the radioactive contamination may pose a threat to health in the long-term, in December 2013, the EPA took action to reduce people’s potential exposure to the radiation and address the potential health risks from the site.

The now-defunct Wolff-Alport Chemical Company operated from 1920 until 1954, processing imported monazite sand and extracting rare earth metals. Monazite contains approximately 6% to 8% thorium, which is radioactive. Radiation can increase a person’s risk of developing cancer such as cancer of the lung or pancreas.

“By placing the Wolff-Alport Chemical Company site on the Superfund list, the EPA can address the contamination to protect people’s health in the long-term,” said Judith A. Enck, EPA Regional Administrator.

The Wolff-Alport Chemical Company site includes 1125 to 1139 Irving Avenue and 1514 Cooper Avenue in Ridgewood, on the border of Brooklyn and Queens. During its years of operation, the facility occupied three structures and two yard areas at 1127 Irving Avenue. The company did not operate out of 1125 Irving Avenue or 1514 Cooper Avenue, but those properties were affected by the contamination. Today the site includes six parcels of land with five buildings that house several small businesses, office space and warehouses. Until 1947, the company disposed of thorium waste in the sewer and on its property. The U.S. Atomic Energy Commission ordered the company to stop those practices in 1947.

The EPA assisted New York State and New York City in conducting radiological surveys in the area. These surveys identified waste material and radioactivity throughout the property, beneath adjacent public sidewalks and streets and in nearby sewers above levels expected to be found in a comparable urban area. The EPA, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York State Department of Health are working together to reduce potential long-term exposure to radiation from the site.

Beginning in August 2012, the EPA took samples to assess the site and determine what immediate cleanup work would be necessary. The EPA used the results of this sampling to take steps to protect people from exposure in the short-term. At Intermediate School 384, radioactive gas was coming from a hole in an unoccupied storage area. The hole was sealed with concrete and follow-up sampling results showed levels below the action level established by the technical experts. At the Terra Nova Construction Company, the EPA installed a mitigation system that reduced radiation levels to below the action level.

Additional EPA actions included:

- Placement of shielding material, including concrete, lead and steel beneath the building floors and the sidewalk to reduce potential exposure.
- Installation of systems to reduce or address radioactive gas in the affected interior space of businesses.

- Outreach to the community and local businesses and their employees to keep them informed, including holding a public meeting.
- Installation of a fence around a vacant parcel of land adjacent to the affected businesses to prevent trespassing onto an area where radiation contamination is present.

The EPA periodically proposes sites to the Superfund list and, after responding to public comments, determines whether it is appropriate to designate them as final Superfund sites. The Superfund program operates on the principle that polluters should pay for the cleanups, rather than passing the costs to taxpayers. The EPA searches for parties legally responsible for the contamination at sites that are placed on the Superfund list and it seeks to hold those parties accountable for the costs of investigations and cleanups. EPA is evaluating potentially responsible parties regarding the site. The EPA has spent about \$2 million on the site to date.

Today's decision brings the total number of proposed and final sites on the Superfund list in New York to 87. The addition of the Wolff-Alport site, along with the Gowanus Canal site in Brooklyn and the Newtown Creek site on the border of Brooklyn and Queens, brings the total for proposed and final sites on the Superfund list in New York City to three.

To learn more about the Wolff-Alport site, please visit:

<http://www.epa.gov/region02/waste/wolff/index.html>.

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