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EPA Removes Downtown Montgomery from Proposed Superfund Priorities List

Announcement Culminates Work By EPA, ADEM and Downtown Alliance to Clean Up Groundwater and Soil Contamination

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – Two decades of work by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and an alliance of governmental and business groups to identify, monitor and clean up contaminated groundwater and soil in a 50-block area of downtown Montgomery culminated in the recent EPA announcement that the Capital City Plume Superfund Site will not be included on the National Priorities List (NPL).

The announcement formally confirms that the EPA is satisfied with the remediation work and the oversight by ADEM and no longer considers the site a public health threat worthy of priority status. It also should give another boost to downtown economic revitalization, which in recent years has seen the building of a minor league baseball park, riverfront park, amphitheater, black history museums and entertainment district.

“This is validation of all the hard work by many parties – city, county, state, federal and business entities – over many years to address and resolve a real environmental challenge,” said ADEM Director Lance LeFleur. “It couldn’t have happened without all the parties deciding we needed a plan to tackle the problem and agreeing to work together to carry it out. Now, this area of downtown Montgomery that has already seen significant redevelopment and reuse can blossom even more.”

The EPA’s action to remove the Capital City Plume from its proposed NPL listing was part of the federal agency’s larger announcement last week that it had added six other Superfund sites to the priority list and is proposing the addition of four others. None of the 10 sites are in Alabama.

The NPL includes the nation’s sites with the most serious uncontrolled or abandoned releases of contamination. The list serves as the basis for prioritizing EPA Superfund cleanup funding and enforcement actions.

ADEM began investigating a report of soil contamination in downtown Montgomery in 1993. Subsequent investigations found several zones of contaminated groundwater under the downtown area, including contamination in two city wells. Contaminants detected were volatile organic compounds, including

various forms of dry cleaning solvents, cleaning agents and degreasers. A chemical wholesaler, auto repair shops and dry cleaners were identified as possible sources.

The site was proposed for listing on the National Priorities List in 2000.

Remediation actions taken included emergency soil excavation; groundwater monitoring; abandonment of all affected public water supply wells and closing all private wells in the area; planting trees that help remove contaminants; use of vapor barriers in some buildings; and implementing ordinances and other land use rules to prevent groundwater use and future potential vapor intrusion risks.

In 2012, the City of Montgomery, Montgomery County, the Montgomery Water Works and Sanitary Sewer Board, the State of Alabama, the Montgomery Advertiser, Standard Roofing of Montgomery and other businesses formed the Downtown Environmental Alliance. The Alliance worked with the EPA and ADEM to develop an action plan and agreement to address remaining remediation needs. It also agreed to reimburse the EPA for the costs of the federal agency's involvement with the site.

ADEM, through an agreement with the EPA, has overseen site assessment and remediation since 2015.

"We wouldn't be where we are today without the efforts of former Mayor Todd Strange and other members of the Alliance who made a commitment to work with ADEM and the EPA to turn what could have been a disastrous, long-term impediment for the city into a model of cooperation among regional leaders," LeFleur said.

Strange also expressed gratitude for the removal of the proposed NPL listing. "This shows what can be accomplished when we all get on the same page," he said. "The hard work paid off. The evidence is a downtown area that has drawn numerous redevelopment projects and is now the entertainment hub for the region."

Current Mayor Steven Reed echoed those sentiments.

"This announcement charts a path forward for our community and is essential to our vision for a stronger, more vibrant downtown core," Mayor Reed said. "We commend the collaboration and steady resolve of the Alliance, ADEM, the EPA and everyone involved in doing what is right for our city and our region. Moving forward, we are committed to continue building on this success as we expand economic opportunity and progress in Montgomery."

For more information about the Capital City Plume, go online to www.capitalcityplume.org.

For more information about the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, go to www.adem.alabama.gov.

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