

Awareness is key to cleaning up contaminated sites



Lau-Rene Manuel, waste coordinator at the Cary Institute, illustrates the proper handling of hazardous waste. / Courtesy photo

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The Dutchess County Environmental Management Council recently completed a State of the Environment report for Dutchess County. This is the eighth in a series of articles from the report. The entire report can be found online at <http://dutchessemc.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/dcsoereport2012.pdf.cq>

Dutchess County has five hazardous waste sites in the federal Superfund Program that are listed on the program's National Priorities List. Hazardous waste sites placed on the National Priorities List are overseen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and present "a significant risk to human health or the environment."

They are eligible for remediation from the Superfund trust fund if a potentially responsible party cannot be identified to pay for the cleanup.

Dutchess County also has three sites under a separate federal program called the Resource Conservation Recovery Act, which are being monitored by the EPA. Through the Resource Conservation Recovery Act program, the EPA has the authority to control the hazardous waste at these sites from "cradle-to-grave." This includes the generation, transportation, treatment, storage and disposal of hazardous waste.

In New York, there are only five counties in New York that have more Superfund and Resource Conservation Recovery Act sites than Dutchess.

In addition to the hazardous waste sites being remediated under the EPA's authority, there are numerous hazardous waste sites in Dutchess County under the jurisdiction of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's State Superfund Program. The Superfund program identifies and characterizes suspected inactive hazardous waste disposal sites and investigates and remediates those sites that pose a significant threat to public health or the environment.

The DEC also maintains two other databases: the Spill Incident Database and the Bulk Storage Database. Through the Spill Response Program, DEC responds to reports of petroleum and other hazardous material releases (both large and very minor spills). DEC staff investigate spill reports and take action based on the type of material spilled, the potential environmental damage and safety risks to the public.

In 2011, the DEC recorded and responded to more than 375 incidents in Dutchess County. The DEC's Bulk Storage Program Database maintains the registrations of more than 60,000 active and inactive bulk storage sites across New York, including petroleum bulk storage, major oil storage facilities and chemical bulk storage sites.

In New York, any underground tank more than 1,100 gallons must be registered with the DEC. Tanks are mainly used for petroleum storage and include everything from gasoline, fuel oil, diesel, kerosene, gear oils and hydraulic oils. As of December 2011, there were 1,107 sites in the DEC's Bulk Storage Program Database in Dutchess County.

It is critical that local municipal officials and residents remain aware of the locations and cleanup status of hazardous waste sites and report any spills or suspected hazardous waste sites to the DEC immediately.

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