



Superfund365 - Email Recap

| [Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

Tuesday, 23 October 2007

A Town Built on "Clean Fill," The Winning Raybestos Brakettes and Their Losing Field and Why Still No Ban on Asbestos?

Day 40 of Week Six I spent with several, young families in Stratford, CT. Stratford -- a town with a population of roughly 50,000 -- is desirable due to its location in southwestern Connecticut sandwiched between the Long Island Sound and the mouth of the Housatonic River. The prices of homes are reasonable, or at least for Fairfield County. The families I met thought they were moving into their dream neighborhood. The town center along Main Street is thriving, the local public schools are good, there are parks, playing fields, a pond and, of course, the beach. At the town's harbor, a marker proudly proclaims the area to be "the traditional landing place of Stratford's First Settlers in the spring of 1639." This was under the leadership of the Puritan Reverend Adam Blakeman.

The sign does not, however, commemorate another part of Stratford's more recent history. Such a sign would read: Stratford is home to the [Raymark Industries Superfund Site](#), discovered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1981. Raymark Corporation (formerly called Raybestos-Manhattan and currently Raytech Corporation) disposed of its manufacturing waste at the main plant (75 East Main Street) but there was so much that they had to spread it around to numerous residential, commercial and municipal properties throughout town. Modern-day Stratford is, in fact, built upon Raymark waste sludge, whose signature contaminants include lead, asbestos and PCBs. In the 1950s, the company was giving it away for free, calling it "clean fill!" It was fill created from years of manufacturing gaskets, clutches, and heavy brake friction components for the car industry mixed with topsoil.

The EPA placed Stratford on the Superfund's National Priority List in 1994 and started cleanup the following year. 30,000 cubic feet of soil from Wooster Middle School's playing fields was excavated and deposited at the main Raymark facility (Operable Unit #1 or OU1). More soil throughout town was later consolidated there and 15 acres of buildings were demolished. In 1997, a 36-acre cap was placed over the property, which today is the Stratford Crossing Retail Center with a Home Depot and Wal-mart.

Many people in town believed that was the end of it. But the Raymark Advisory Committee, a Stratford group whose members are appointed by the Town Council, estimated in 2000 that as much as 1,000,000 cubic yards of Raymark waste was still remaining unaddressed.

The families I met all moved to Stratford after 2000 and at first knew nothing about Stratford's Superfund designation or the 1990s cleanup. The Watson's, who moved to town with their baby daughter in May 2007, learned about it when he went to buy propane for the bar-b-que. He couldn't find any on the shelves at the Home Depot and, when he asked, the salesperson just laughed. "We can't sell that here. This is a Superfund site!"

Other new residents found out about Raymark Superfund last July when EPA posted flyers on front doors. The flyer notified residents about three upcoming public meetings to discuss Raymark waste consolidation plans that are outlined in [the draft feasibility plan](#) published January 2007.

One Stratford resident received the notice a day after he closed on his new home on Housatonic Avenue. He had no idea that the vacant wetlands directly over his backyard fence, called Ferry Creek or Operable Unit #3, is contaminated. And after reading through the plan, he realized it is also the potential resting place for more Raymark waste. It is one of three spots currently under consideration by the EPA for consolidation of 24 separate, contaminated areas across town that make up Operable Unit #6.

A Willow Avenue resident showed me an EPA map outlining the Ferry Creek consolidation area. He points to the edge of his property and explains how the highlighted area actually covers his backyard where his children play. It took him months to get his hands on this map and now he is battling to get them to correct it. He also shows me the ventilation system attached to the side of his house installed by the EPA. It draws the VOCs from his basement and disperses the chemicals into the air above our heads. The VOCs are present in the groundwater and can change from liquid into gas, entering the home through the

Main Menu

- [Home](#)
- [Critical Reading](#)
- [Take Action](#)
- [News Archive](#)
- [Our Concerns](#)
- [About Us](#)

Mailing List

Calendar

☾ < June 2012 > ☽						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Site Search

Who's Online

foundation. The chemicals were originally dumped by Raymark at OU1 and are migrating east, under i-95 through this neighborhood towards the Long Island Sound.

Next I went to the Raybestos Memorial Field to check out the second location proposed for consolidation. It seems just as unlikely a spot to haul and dump Raymark fill because it borders residential homes as well as a neighborhood bar, a Department of Public Works facility, school sports field and the dog pound. The residents in these houses used to enjoy their close proximity to the ballfield; they could just wonder out their backyards and into the park to see the wining Brakettes. It was not unusual for fireworks to light up the night sky over the field in celebration. The [Brakettes](#), a women's softball team, has 27 National Championships and they won eight titles straight from 1971 through 1978. They were and still are the pride of Stratford, along with the now defunct American Shakespeare Festival Theater.

But before this land became the Brakettes' stomping field, it was a disposal area for the real thing, Raybestos brake linings and associated industrial wastes. EPA investigations found hazardous materials up to 16 feet deep including asbestos, lead, arsenic, and PCBs. In 1992, the field lights turned off and the security fence went up. Today it remains untouched like a prehistoric wonder with vines growing up the towering light posts and decrepit remnants of a field house. Sometimes locals see homeless people sleeping in there.

The third and last location on the table for consolidation is Operable Unit #9 or Short Beach Park. This is an area of land southwest of town that is currently a heavily used recreation area for baseball, softball, soccer, golf, skateboarding and beach bathing. OU9 is the large plot of land that lies between this recreational area and the neighboring Igor I. Sikorsky Memorial Airport, which used to be the town dump. Raymark wastes have been found to be present there too.

On the north side of Short Beach, is the former Stratford Army Engine Plant where the Army built Corsair jets, also known as the "Sweetheart of Okinawa" or "Whistling Death" depending which side of the war you fought. The Army Engine Plant is currently for sale (!) and is being touted as "an extraordinary 78 acre redevelopment opportunity in Fairfield County." The property is for sale on an "as is" basis, transferring all environmental remediation obligations to the buyer. Extra-ordinary indeed.

The folks I talked with are quickly brushing up on the industrial history of the town, learning what cleanup has already occurred and whose money spent. They have formed a neighborhood group called [SaveStratford.org](#) to fight the consolidation plan as described in the draft feasibility study. They don't want years of digging and transporting toxic materials across their town. They want real and long-term solutions. The EPA states that there is only \$21 million on the table for the job and consolidation in town is a good way to use the money available. The money is reportedly proceeds from the sale of the Raymark facility, which is now the shopping center. More money is unlikely, the Raymark Advisory Committee has already learned, because the Superfund national fund is "seriously depleted and highly constrained."

The apparent good health of Raytech Corporation is questioned by Stratford residents as they fear for their families' health. The company was protected by Chapter 11 bankruptcy for over a decade (1989-2001) to avoid costly lawsuits and has since moved its car clutch operations to Liverpool, England, and China. One resident asked me if I knew that asbestos is [still not banned in the US](#) even though it well understood as one of the worst toxic substances for human health. Even the ancient Greeks observed that asbestos was extremely harmful to the lungs!

The residents wonder why a [comprehensible database of EPA test results for Stratford properties](#) is not public even though it is finished and paid for with state money. The database was originally designed to keep track of the contamination and open communication channels between community groups and the EPA. Residents want to know what properties are in the database and the specific contaminants found.

The next EPA meeting in town is scheduled for the end of the year or the beginning of 2008. Until that time, [SaveStratford.org](#) will collect signatures online and continue to push for full disclosure and a long-term cleanup plan, not matter how much it costs.

One mother told me she would never move into a home again without testing the soil and checking the EPA Superfund database. She also said that in the five years she has lived in Stratford, this is the first time she has experienced a sense of community. People are calling her from the market to see if she needs anything.

Special Announcement:

Tomorrow Senator Clinton to Hold Oversight Hearing on Federal Superfund Program's Activities to Protect Public Health. She is advocating once again holding polluters accountable for cleanup by reinstating a fee on oil and chemical companies that previously provided funding for the now bankrupt Superfund Trust Fund.

Witnesses include: Susan Bodine, Assistant Administrator, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response of the EPA and Lenny Siegel, Director, Center for Public Environmental Oversight.

The hearing will be webcast:
<http://epw.senate.gov/>

Brooke Singer / [Superfund365.org](#)

[< Prev](#) [Next >](#)

[\[Back \]](#)

Copyright © 2007 SaveStratford.org | Created and Maintained by Citizens to Save Stratford | [Contact Us](#)

