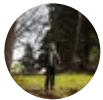


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ENVIRONMENT

Plans to clean up Eugene yards contaminated near J.H. Baxter plant still in the works



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State environmental regulators and the operators of a west Eugene industrial site still are developing plans for cleaning up residential yards polluted by dangerous chemicals.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is in talks with J.H. Baxter & Co., the operator of a west Eugene wood treatment facility, about the details of soil replacement at six residences near the plant. DEQ announced Jan. 13 "concerning levels" of dioxins, a class of toxic chemicals, associated with the plant were found in nearby soil samples.

DEQ says affected homes need soil replacement treatment, some sooner than others. Three of the six contaminated properties need cleanup "as soon as possible," DEQ said.

Related: Oregon DEQ finds carcinogenic compounds in west Eugene yards around J.H. Baxter & Co. plant

Dioxins are carcinogenic and primarily enter the body through ingestion.

DEQ is holding J.H. Baxter & Co. responsible for the contamination. The soil testing was part of an investigation into the spread of dioxins, originally found at the company facility.

J.H. Baxter & Co. President Georgia Baxter did not respond to requests for comment.

DEQ also found elevated levels of dioxins in samples from Trainsong Park, about 1.5 miles east of the facility, though their source is unknown and not believed to be associated with J.H. Baxter operations.

Dioxins can be created by industrial processes, but also can occur naturally.

DEQ still is making plans with the city of Eugene for further testing at the park to determine the extent of the problem, though no timeline has been announced.

City spokeswoman Cambra Ward said the park remains closed.

Details still being worked out

DEQ spokesman Dylan Darling said the agency is working out details with J.H. Baxter & Co., including which contractor will do the soil replacement and when they will begin.

"One of the things we're trying to figure out is just how much does need to be removed," he said. "We're mainly talking about contaminated soil, but it can include other things."

Darling said DEQ wants the most contaminated yards cleaned up by early summer and would oversee the contractor's work.

The agency discovered dioxins in soil samples from a seventh home near the plant, but did not find levels requiring cleanup. Dioxins also were found in soil samples from other nearby locations, such as Petersen Park, but not at levels necessitating cleanup, Darling said.

Chemicals like dioxins are regulated in part by expectations for exposure. Levels that are considered dangerous in a residential yard, where children might be exposed every day, aren't as strict in places like parks, where children would be exposed for less time.

Additional testing of locations farther away from the plant will begin soon.

Previous coverage: Eugene wood treatment facility J.H. Baxter fined more than \$200,000 for repeated environmental violations

'This situation is unacceptable'

Meanwhile, some local groups are calling for immediate action.

Beyond Toxics, a Eugene nonprofit that has been calling attention to a history of pollution at the J.H. Baxter & Co. facility for years, and the Active Bethel Citizens neighborhood association last week sent a letter to city officials calling for them to ask that the plant be shut down.

"Eugene residents living in the vicinity of J.H. Baxter know their own long history of being exposed to J.H. Baxter's air, water and soil pollution. Many hundreds of residents have filed complaint after complaint describing suffering the ill effects and loss of wellbeing as a direct

result of J.H. Baxter's air toxics and water pollution. Many more residents have given up trying to engage with our local and state regulators from fear of dismissiveness and minimal responsiveness. This situation is unacceptable and the community no longer can endure ongoing pollution from J.H. Baxter," the letter reads.

The letter calls on local officials to ask Gov. Kate Brown, DEQ and the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency to revoke the plant's operating permits with a cease and desist order.

Ward said city officials have received the letter, but have not issued a response.

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