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Dumont tackles DPW contamination

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The Dumont Department of Public Works complex at 1 Aladdin Place has been cited by the Department of Environmental Protection for environmental contamination, with the matter being referred to the state attorney general for an investigation.

Dumont borough officials reported last week that the paperwork associated with the contamination is missing from borough hall.

In 1997, the borough and the DEP reached an agreement to commence a cleanup of the site.

That agreement, however, ended in 2000 after the borough failed to answer a request for plan revisions pertaining to the cleanup.

A letter from the DEP, mentioned in an earlier report, states that nothing happened at the site after the borough failed to respond to the request for revisions.

The Sept. 29 letter ordered the borough to clean up groundwater and soil contamination that dates to the mid-1980s.

In July and again in September, state officials inspected the site in an attempt to clear a backlog of contaminated sites throughout the state, DEP spokesman Larry Hajna said in the report.

Hajna said there are several thousand leaking underground storage tanks statewide located on non-residential property that are listed in the DEP's files.

The investigation comes on the heels of the closing of Twin Boro Field for groundwater tests and an environmental cleanup, which is expected to take up to a year to complete.

The field has already been closed several months after contamination was discovered earlier this year.

Contamination was also discovered in a grassy area located behind Bergen County Housing Authority's David Roche complex.

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Chemicals discovered at the DPW site are similar to those found at Twin Boro Field.

A cleanup proposal referred to in the earlier report and dating back to 1998, said chemicals that are commonly found in coal ash, known as polyaromatic hydrocarbons, exist at the DPW site.

Earlier this summer, the borough discovered the same chemicals at Twin Boro Field.

Groundwater at the sites also contained, according to the report, petroleum products that seeped from several underground storage tanks

Borough Administrator John Perkins said that, when the letter from the state came in, there were records regarding the DPW site.

He did turn over documents from Nowell, Amoroso, Klein and Bierman, a Hackensack law firm that represented the borough in the late 1990s through the early 2000s to The Record, which reviewed files made available to the newspaper after a request under the Open Public Records Act.

Mayor Matthew McHale said that he was saddened and angry that documents were missing.

The governing body has asked the borough's engineer, T&M Associates, to prepare a cleanup proposal.

As for the cleanup, a hydrogeologist with the firm said further testing would be needed to assess the current pollution levels at the site.

"Based on the review that I have done to date, that plume appears to be stabilized and appears not to be getting larger, which is a good thing," hydrogeologist Bill Matulewicz was quoted as saying.

Matulewicz explained that gasoline spills tend to remediate themselves due to bacteria in the ground that help break down the chemicals.

The cleanup involves contamination left over from the removal of two gasoline tanks at the DPW complex, the first tank was removed in 1987 while the other was removed three years later.

Perkins said the borough's insurance will not pay for the cleanup or investigation.

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McHale said that the previous GOP administration never filed insurance claims.

"We are going to need to look at some future options (to pay for the cleanup), perhaps some long-term financial bonding," the mayor said.

Both Republicans and Democrats used the investigation and the funding of the cleanup to assign blame.

Former Mayor Donald Winant, a Republican who served from 1992 until he resigned in 2003, said testing was conducted during his administration.

Winant, in the earlier report said he found it difficult to believe that none of the documentation was at borough hall.

"You couldn't lose that much paperwork," he said, and "for them to sit back now and say they don't have files is ludicrous."

Council Democrats however, counter that the investigation mirrors management issues that they said they inherited upon taking control of the municipal government in 2005, including \$1 million in unpaid bills.

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