

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

EPA Administrator Pledges Strong Federal Cleanup Presence at Dow Dioxin Site in Michigan and Accelerated Assessment of Dioxins' Human Health Impacts

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(Washington, D.C. – May 26, 2009) Administrator Lisa P. Jackson today committed to a federal leadership role in expediting the ongoing cleanup of the Michigan Dow Dioxin site and an acceleration of the Environmental Protection Agency's overall scientific review of dioxins.

"EPA is stepping up our commitment to this site, in partnership with the state of Michigan, so that we can accelerate this cleanup and deal with the pressing threats to human health and the environment," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "We are also redoubling our efforts to provide guidance on the science of dioxin health effects to inform cleanup decisions at this site and protect other communities, in Michigan and across the country, facing dioxin contamination."

Dioxins, a class of hundreds of chemicals that are difficult to remove from water and soil, are produced by industries that incinerate waste or manufacture chemicals and pesticides. The Dow Chemical site in Midland, Michigan contains significant dioxin contamination that extends for 50 miles down the Tittabawassee and Saginaw Rivers and into the Saginaw Bay.

In a letter to community members affected by the contamination, Administrator Jackson announced today that EPA, working closely with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, will take lead responsibility for cleanup efforts in significant portions of the Saginaw Bay watershed under the federal Superfund program. She said that EPA would commit the resources and expertise necessary to accelerate site investigation and cleanup and protect human health and the environment.

EPA has developed milestones and schedules for achieving a comprehensive and expeditious cleanup and will present them at a public meeting in Michigan on June 17.

As one part of its overall cleanup plan, EPA will continue to negotiate an agreement requiring Dow to sample the rivers and bay for dioxin contamination and identify options for cleanup. Administrator Jackson pledged an unprecedented degree of transparency during these negotiations so the public has a full opportunity to be heard. Once the agreement is in place, EPA will implement a comprehensive public involvement plan going forward.

While EPA hopes to work cooperatively with the company, Jackson said that the agency will not hesitate to use all tools at its disposal – including a wide range of penalties and sanctions – to ensure Dow Chemical upholds its responsibility to clean up this site. If Dow fails to meet its responsibilities, EPA will conduct the cleanup at the company's expense.

Administrator Jackson also announced today that the EPA will accelerate the long-delayed scientific process to complete the assessment of the health risks dioxins pose to the public at the Dow site and many other sites around the country. The administrator committed to releasing a draft report by December 31, 2009 and a final report and assessment by the end of 2010.

The draft report, which will be subject to public comment and peer review, will address the latest science on the issue and respond to concerns raised by the National Academies of Science in 2006 about a previous EPA draft dioxin assessment.

To provide more immediate guidance at the Dow site and elsewhere, the administrator also said that, based on a comprehensive review of state cleanup levels and the relevant science, EPA will announce interim cleanup goals by the end of the year and would review a Dow-funded study on dioxin exposure by September 30.

More information on Administrator Jackson's letter:
<http://www.epa.gov/region5/sites/dowchemical/index.htm#200905>

More information on EPA's science plan for dioxin: <http://epa.gov/dioxin/scienceplan>

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