



1996

(USPS226-160) FIFTY CENTS

Granite City kicked off the season for local youngsters' baseball and softball teams.

Page 5A



by JOHN FRESE
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EPA cleanup ineffective

Most homes found recontaminated in 3 years

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By Bob Slate
Staff writer

The yards of many of 38 Granite City homes where the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency "cleaned up" lead contaminated soil two to three years ago have already become recontaminated with lead, according to a soon-to-be-released report.

And in most of the homes evaluated, lead concentration inside was actually higher after the yards outside were scraped of the top six inches of lead-contaminated soil and replaced with "clean" dirt and sod, the study says.

There are three possible explanations for the continued existence of high concentrations of lead in yards already remediated: incomplete lead cleanup by EPA's contractor, lead contamination in the supposedly "clean" soil the contractor used to replace yards or recontamination from other sources of lead.

"The Effectiveness of Soil Removal on Lead Exposure in Granite City," a new study performed by the University of Cincinnati, concludes that the EPA's \$75 million lead cleanup in Granite City has been — and will continue to be — ineffective and does not reduce health risks associated with lead exposure. The cleanup plan is ineffective because

'The study results ... demonstrated that abatement of residential soil does not effectively reduce house dust lead levels and therefore is likely to have a minimal effect on lead exposure.'

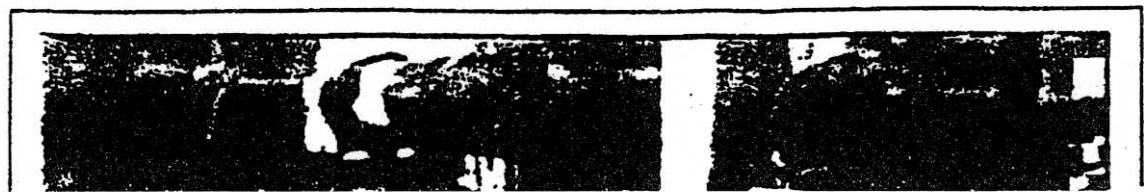
— Study summary

it is based on faulty assumptions and because it ignores major, ongoing sources of lead in the cleanup area that continue to contaminate property and homes, the study states.

While NL Industries operated a lead smelter in the downtown Granite City area for decades, the smelter has been shut down for 15 years. The study concludes that recontamination is coming from at least two ongoing sources EPA failed to recognize when formulating its cleanup plan six years ago.

U.S. EPA began its \$75 million cleanup of the area surrounding the NL Industries/Taracorp Superfund site (See CLEANUP, Page 2A)

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(Staff photo by BOB SLATE)

U.S. EPA is in the middle of soil removal at this home in downtown Granite City.

•Cleanup

(Continued from Page 1A)

several years ago. The cleanup plan includes scraping the top six to 12 inches of soil from as many as 1,600 residential yards with lead concentrations of 500 or more parts per million. The plan does not address removal of either a 30-acre, 290,000-ton lead scrap pile located at 15th and State streets or lead-based paint from homes.

Lead is believed to retard mental growth in children and cause hyperactivity and other health problems.

An 18-month, \$500,000 study conducted three years ago by the Illinois Department of Health found that 16 percent of 490 children within a three-mile radius of the Superfund site had elevated levels of lead in their blood, but concluded that lead sources such as lead paint and lead in household dust contributed more to the elevated levels than lead in soil. While U.S. EPA has attacked the method IDOH used to measure lead paint levels in the health study, the new study by the university states that IDOH's results were valid.

Granite City has joined a federal lawsuit between the U.S. EPA and the parties deemed potentially responsible for the cleanup, asking EPA to rethink its cleanup plan because city leaders and some health officials do not believe the soil removal will significantly reduce health risks. The city has also blocked attempts by the EPA to remove soil from city-owned property and easements.

The University of Cincinnati study apparently supports the city's position on the cleanup plan, but Assistant City Attorney Ed Fitzhenry declined to publicly release the results of the new study until next week. He said the city is obligated to provide the information to the federal government before releasing it to the public.

The *Press-Record* obtained a copy of the executive summary of the study Tuesday.

The university study found that some homes and yards in downtown Granite City that were "cleaned up" by U.S. EPA in 1993 and '94 — at a cost of \$35,000 to \$45,000 each — have already become recontaminated with lead.

"The study results ... demonstrated that abatement of residential soil does not effectively reduce house dust lead levels and therefore is likely to have a minimal effect on lead exposure," the executive summary of the report states.

Lead levels inside some homes have actually increased since the "cleanup" took place, possibly recontaminated by lead in paint, by lead dust that was disturbed during soil

removal or by lead dust blowing from the giant scrap lead pile, according to the executive summary.

When formulating its cleanup plan, EPA concluded that removal of residual lead from the now-defunct smelter would effectively remove the risk of human exposure to lead.

But the university study concludes that recontamination is coming from two sources EPA failed or refused to identify when formulating its cleanup plan six years ago — lead-based paint on homes and fugitive lead dust from the lead scrap pile at 15th and State streets.

The university's Environmental Health Department studied lead levels at 38 homes where U.S. EPA removed contaminated soil in 1993 and 1994. Specifically, lead levels were measured inside and outside the homes, in the street and alley, in the air and in the soil.

"The study reveals two sources of lead contamination not considered by U.S. EPA in the agency's formulation of a risk management strategy: lead-based residential paint and street dust transported from the Taracorp site by either wind action or by trucks traveling from the site and through the city," the executive summary states.

While lead from the smelter contaminating city streets should have long since been removed by rain and street sweeping, the study states, street lead dust levels were recorded.

"It is likely that the currently-observed street dust lead levels reflect current and ongoing contamination from the Taracorp site," the report states.

Two weeks ago, U.S. EPA provided the city with a list of about 100 more yards the agency plans to "clean up" in the next two months.

Following a 30-minute closed session Tuesday night, the City Council authorized Fitzhenry to "take the appropriate legal action" with regard to the cleanup.

Granite City Mayor Ron Selph said that he has personally witnessed dust blowing near the lead pile and from residential yards when EPA was conducting cleanup activities.

"Of course I don't know that the dust contained lead. But wish I had a camera at the time," Selph said.

Alderman Craig Tarpoff, who has been leading the city's fight against the EPA plan, said that Dr. Robert Bornschein, professor of Environmental Health at the University of Cincinnati and the man who oversaw the new study, one of the world's leading experts on lead.

Bornschein was out of the country Wednesday and could not be reached for comment.

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Hosts sought for exchange students