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## Residents call for better engagement as cleanup progresses at Hercules site

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Glynn County Commissioner Allen Booker and others in the community had a clear message for those working to clean up a toxic waste site in Brunswick: Approach the challenge like your mother lived there.

Work is underway to implement a corrective action plan at the Hercules/Pinova site on U.S. 17, where the hazardous chemical toxaphene was once produced and has infiltrated the groundwater and soil.

At recent public engagement opportunities residents learned about the cleanup plans and shared their thoughts about what they said was long-needed work.



The state's Environmental Protection Division oversees the project and recently opened for public comment the permit modification for the Hercules/Pinova hazardous waste permit. The permit will require implementation of the corrective action plan.

Hercules' history at the site stretches back more than 100 years. Production at the site began in 1911 and included toxaphene, later identified as a toxic chemical.

Hercules began operating at the Brunswick facility in 1920, producing rosin and turpentine from pine stumps.

Production of toxaphene ended in 1980 and investigations into contamination began soon after.

“In 2010, Hercules sold the manufacturing plant, and the permit was updated to add Pinova, who is the current operator of the plant,” said Jim McNamara, program manager of the hazardous waste corrective action program at Georgia EPD. “Pinova’s gone through a couple of different owners since then.”

An investigation in 2015 led to the corrective action plan being discussed now.

“We identified the location of and composition of virtually all of the contamination that was on the facility and a decent amount of the contamination that was off the facility,” McNamara said. “This modification is going to require corrective action for contaminated soils, for contaminated groundwater and vapor intrusion.”

The corrective action plan contains what McNamara called a toolbox with numerous types of technology that have been used or can be used to clean up the contamination.

Early into his presentation, attendees began asking questions about possible contamination in other parts of the county and for better explanations of what will be done at the Hercules site.

“It’s great that you’re here, and you’re talking about this corrective action,” said Jazz Watts, justice strategist with the environmental nonprofit One Hundred Miles “But it is just obvious that when it comes to actual engagement, at least with this community, there’s just a lot of work that’s left to be done.”

Rachael Thompson, executive director of Glynn Environmental Coalition, offered a comment on behalf of her organization.

“We believe that our comments can be summarized with one word — finally,” she said. “In 2020, we stood before you and asked that once and for all the EPD hold Hercules and Pinova accountable for the damage they have done in this community. And though we believe there’s still more to be done ... we can say once and for all that something is being done.”

Geosyntec Consultants has worked with Hercules since 2019 to create the corrective action plan.

“We’ve done a lot of work,” said Gregory Roush, a geologist with Geosyntec. “It’s a pretty thick document. I know it’s pretty technical, but we’re making progress. We have to start somewhere. The adaptive approach is good. It’s focused on getting something done. It’s science-based.”

He said more information can be found at [herculesbrunswick.com](http://herculesbrunswick.com).

Anita Collins, a resident who attended last week’s public engagement meeting, said afterward that it was too long and too difficult for the layman to understand.

“The majority of the people who live in this community, in this neighborhood that’s impacted directly by this, we’re not science majors,” she told Roush. “So if you really want to inform us and help us be educated about it, then you’ve got to do a better job.”

The communication provided during the presentation conveyed little to the audience, she said.

“If you’re talking about coming into the community to inform, then inform, OK?” she said.

Roush apologized and said he recognizes much of the information about the plan is highly technical. The takeaway, he said, is that a lot of work is being done to make progress on cleaning up the site.

“Nobody’s drinking the groundwater,” he said. “It’s moving away from the neighborhood. We’re trying to clean the groundwater up with the best technologies we have. That’s what I want you to take away.”

Booker, who attended the public engagement event, said he’s tried for years to get better communication on the issue for the local Black community.

“The process for engagement has to be different for the communities most impacted by it,” Booker said.

The standard for those addressing the clean up, Booker said, needs to be doing so as if a loved one lived near the site.

“We want you to work on this like your mama lived over there or your daughter,” he said. “That’s what we want each of you to do because when you’re working on it then it will always be on your mind to go beyond and think outside of the box.”

Public comments on the permit can be made through Nov. 1 and can be mailed to EPD at 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, SE, Suite 1054, Floyd Towers East, Atlanta Georgia 30334-9000.

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