

Effingham County Odor Investigation Update

On Sunday September 24, 2023, there was a release of approximately 500 gallons of pretreated sulfate turpentine at the DRT facility, all of which was captured in a concrete secondary containment area at the facility and did not leave the site. The release also resulted in odors that resulted in concerned citizens contacting Environmental Protection Division (EPD). EPD conducted multiple investigations of the complaints and documented that a gasket failure likely caused the spill. During these investigations, EPD also concluded that the September 24th spill was likely the cause of the odors.

Air samples were taken on September 26, 2023. An initial evaluation of the results did not identify any public health concerns. EPD is still analyzing results and has shared the data with US EPA for their input prior to public release.

Corrective actions taken by DRT America were to transfer the remaining chemical into an empty tank, that was sealed. DRT also hired an environmental remediation company to pump and haul the chemical in the secondary containment area to an appropriate disposal location. This seemed to remediate the odor issue for about a week.

On October 10, 2023, EPD started receiving additional odor complaints in the area. EPD continued to monitor the area and try to identify this odor.

On October 31, 2023, EPA and EPD conducted a joint investigation at the DRT facility and the surrounding area. Air samples were collected at the facility through both stationary and handheld monitoring devices. Initial readings from the handheld device were well within acceptable limits and did not give the on-scene coordinators any cause for concern.

Both EPD and EPA were not able to identify any strong odors coming from DRT during any of these investigations. We are also looking into other facilities in the area to see if they might be contributing to the odors. EPD personnel have gone by the schools in the area and have not documented any strong odors.

Both EPD and EPA have received complaints alleging these odors are causing people in the community to get sick. We are continuing to investigate this matter.

EPD will continue to conduct air sampling in the area. We have added the Ebenezer Elementary/Ebenezer Middle School area as a new sample point at the request of the school superintendent. We will continue to monitor the air quality in the area to try and determine the source and if air pollutants are present above applicable thresholds.

If you smell the strong odor that people are complaining about, please record the following information: date of the incident, the time and duration, temperature, windspeed, wind direction and describe as best you can the odor. Email the information to coast.epdreporting@dnr.ga.gov and in the subject line type "Effingham Odor Investigation". Once we have enough data, we can use this information to try and backtrack possible sources.

If you have specific questions about one of the permitted facilities in the area, please call EPD's Air Protection Branch at 470-938-3349. For general questions or concerns about unusually strong odors in the Effingham area you can call the EPD Coastal District at 912-264-7284 or email coast.epdreporting@dnr.ga.gov.