

EPA: It's unlikely dust escaped cleanup site

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THROOP — A federal environmental official stressed Friday that an air monitor that failed to collect data is only one of several lines of defense to ensure there is no release of lead-contaminated dust from the Marjol Battery site.

And although it was a serious matter that one of those lines of defense broke down, it would be “very surprising” if significant amounts of dust were found to have left the site, said Maureen Essenthier, the project manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at Marjol.

Human error led one of three air monitors — and the only real-time monitor downwind of the project — to fail to collect data early Thursday. Workers did not properly switch the device from battery power to a corded connection overnight, officials with Advanced GeoServices acknowledged Thursday.

The company — which is the project monitoring group and represents the property owner, Gould Electronics — self-reported the failure, said Ms. Essenthier, and took corrective action EPA would have required.

That action includes sending backup lead monitors — another line of defense, as Ms. Essenthier described — to a laboratory to make sure no lead left the site. Advanced GeoServices will now also have two monitors running downwind of the site whenever there is open excavation.

“The most important measure, wetting down the material, was done. That’s the first line of defense,” Ms. Essenthier said.

The contractor, SCE Environmental Group, began digging up and moving battery-casing material at the site for the first time Wednesday, the day before the air monitor failure. The two-year project includes moving lead-contaminated soil and battery casings to a central location to be encased in concrete.

State Rep. Frank Andrews Shimkus, D-113, and several Throop officials Friday made an unannounced stop at the Marjol site, demanding to be allowed to see the air monitor that failed.

While incensed about another mistake at the site, Mr. Shimkus said he was happy that EPA had taken some of their concerns into consideration.

The group’s concern Friday was: If the air monitors required a corded connection, what would happen if the power went out in the area? It was agreed that an additional battery source is being used with the air monitors.

“What I’m really concerned about is I think they’re learning as they’re going, and it’s scaring the life out of me,” Mr. Shimkus said. “And the EPA, I have absolutely no confidence in them.”

Ms. Essenthier said everyone is aware that releases cannot occur and air monitoring is important for the success of the two-year project.

“We are taking this matter seriously, and if issues are not resolved, we would then take measures,” she said.

This is the third notable misstep on the site, including a July incident in which 12,000 gallons of muddy water was released into a small tributary of the Lackawanna River.

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