

Effingham County Odor Investigation Update 2-12-24

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), along with the Effingham Emergency Management Agency (EMA) Director and other local officials have been investigating odor complaints in the area between Stillwell and Rincon since late September. Multiple investigations have been conducted to determine the source of the odor generating the complaints and to determine if there are any air quality violations that may be causing people to become ill.

On September 26, EPD collected air samples in the immediate aftermath of a wastewater release into a concrete, secondary containment structure at the DRT facility in Rincon, Georgia. The results from these air samples were analyzed by EPA and determined not to present unacceptable risk to residents. Subsequent to the release, EPD conducted an industrial stormwater inspection at the DRT facility on September 27, 2023. EPD is currently working with the company to correct deficiencies identified during the inspection which include permit renewal, record keeping and monitoring issues.

Additional air grab samples were collected on October 23, November 2 and thereafter continue to be collected by EPD on a weekly basis. The samples are collected at three locations: DRT, Ebenezer Middle School, and Rincon City Hall. As the air samples are collected, observations are made at DRT of the thermal oxidizer temperature and scrubber flow rate to look for signs of leakage. EPD has received air sample results for October 23, November 2, November 7, November 11, November 20, November 29, December 5, December 11, December 20, December 28, January 4, January 9, January 16 and January 22. An initial evaluation of these results has not identified any unacceptable risk to residents. However, EPD is still analyzing the results and sharing the data with US EPA for their input. EPD and EPA continue to search for other possible sources in the area that may be contributing to the odors experienced by the community.

In addition, EPD and EPA together, visited the DRT Facility on October 31. Air samples were collected, water quality samples were taken from Ebenezer Creek, and a SPCC (Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures) Plan audit performed.

On November 20, EPD performed an air quality compliance inspection of the DRT facility. The inspection did not identify any violations and no odors were reported.

DRT performed and completed the replacement of gaskets on three storage tanks on December 14, 2023. During the replacement, EPD used a handheld air monitor to record VOCs, hydrogen sulfide and oxygen levels. None of the values observed during that time, posed a concern.

The EPA was requested by the EPD to help aid in additional Air Monitoring and support to determine if harmful toxicants are present in the community. EPA began to mobilize in coordination with EPD and local officials on January 22, 2024. The EPA has placed four water samplers (ISCO drum Samplers) in locations in the Ebenezer Creek, north of the industrial complex, from Log Landing Rd. towards Long Bridge Rd. The EPA has placed eight area RAE monitors to gather data of Oxygen levels, Ammonia levels, H₂S levels, CO levels, LEL levels and VOC. The data will be collected via VIPER telemetry system which will be collected inside the EPA MCP (Mobile Command Post).

As a reminder, any individual may file a complaint with EPD about this matter. In order to properly report a complaint please record the following information: date of the incident, location of the odor occurrence, 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-in "Effingham Odor Investigation". Once we have enough data, we can use this information to backtrack possible sources. The information already submitted has proven useful and informed ongoing aspects of the investigation and sampling efforts by both EPA and EPD.

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.