

Expert Report: \$2+ Million Needed to Evaluate Risk to Residents on Toxic Landfill.

New report shows gaps in EPA's study: The Agriculture Street Landfill may pose an unreasonable risk to New Orleanians whose homes are located on the historic city dump.

October 12, 2021

Contacts:

Shannon Rainey
President, Residents of Gordon Plaza, Inc.
Phone: (504) 416-8225

Lauren Godshall,
Supervising Attorney
Tulane Environmental Law Clinic
Phone: (504) 862-8818

New Orleans, LA: Residents of Gordon Plaza, Inc., whose members live on the Agriculture Street Landfill, today released an [expert report](#) showing crucial gaps in EPA's data about the landfill, which is a Superfund Site. The Report provides a workplan and estimates that \$2,183,492 is needed to fill those data gaps. The report found:

- “Not enough soil sampling has been conducted to determine the extent to which hazardous constituents are present beneath yards and homes.”
- “Not enough groundwater quality and hydrogeological data have been collected to determine the extent of groundwater impacts and no ongoing monitoring has been conducted to determine whether the groundwater quality is being further degraded ...”
- “Insufficient data exist to know if flooding during severe storms ... mobilized groundwater contaminants ... to the overlying cover material where people live. This is a particular concern to the extent that climate change can be expected to increase the incidence and severity of storms and flooding.”
- “Not enough investigative work has been conducted to determine the potential effects on people that eat produce from trees [such as orange trees], bushes and gardens located on top of the abandoned dump site, particularly where roots would encounter landfill material.”
- “Not enough data have been collected to understand the vapor intrusion risks of organic contaminants, including methane gas, migrating from the abandoned dump site and collecting beneath the housing foundations and ultimately migrating into homes.”
- “Because of these significant data gaps, contaminants present beneath yards and homes located on top of the Agriculture Street Landfill Superfund Site may pose an unreasonable risk to human health.”

The August 3, 2021, report is by Stephen Henshaw of EnviroForensics, a professional geologist with more than 30 years of experience working with contaminated properties.

[more]

The [Agriculture Street Landfill](#) is an historic City of [New Orleans dump](#) that the City developed into residential properties. Residents bought houses there without knowing they were moving onto a toxic dump. In the 1990s, the dump became a Superfund Site.

EPA's Superfund Guidance states that "residential use of the landfill source area itself is [not considered appropriate](#)" Nonetheless, EPA left the households in Gordan Plaza on top of the Agriculture Street Landfill. For nine of these properties, EPA has warned that soils "may contain contaminant levels that are [unacceptable for non-industrial use](#)" The federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry concluded in 2006 that "PAH concentrations pose an [indeterminate public health hazard](#) at the [Agriculture Street Landfill] site." PAH stands for polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons. Property owners on the landfill are prohibited from digging more than [18 inches](#) (less than two feet) on their properties without an excavation permit.

An [earlier report](#) (February 21, 2019) by expert toxicologist Richard Thomas Di Giulio, Ph.D. evaluated EPA's most recent study of the site and concluded that "Agriculture Street Landfill residents are most likely subject to a significant elevated probability of developing adverse health effects due to contaminants in the landfill." Dr Di Giulio's report also concluded, "Location of a housing development on top of a municipal landfill is not prudent in terms of public health." Gordan Plaza is "within the census tract found to have the second-highest [consistent rate of cancer](#) among all Louisiana census tracts."

Longtime Gordon Plaza resident Shannon Rainey urged Mayor Cantrell and the City of New Orleans to "take the time and read this entire report, and find out what these scientists are trying to tell us about the toxic land that the Residents are living on, instead of continuing to ignore these results." Marilyn Amar, another longtime resident, notes that "reading this report made me grow frustrated with the City hiding and downplaying pertinent facts about the history of this site. What was initially done by the City to prepare this land for human habitation? As a breast cancer survivor, I have been through enough stress and uncertainty related to living here. This has to end now."

The Residents of Gordon Plaza have ongoing federal litigation against the City, seeking a court order that the City thoroughly document the nature and extent of environmental contamination at the landfill as well as the risks associated with that contamination, and fully abate the endangerment at the site. The District Court ruled that the City's maintenance activities at the landfill under an EPA settlement preclude the Residents' lawsuit and the matter is currently before the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Residents of Gordon Plaza, Inc., is represented by the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic.