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'Sins from the past'



Industrial legacy leaves pollution in S. Tier

Tom Wilber | Ithaca Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

In 1977, the Elmira School District paid one dollar for an abandoned industrial site on which to build a new high school. ■ Even at a buck, this was no bargain. ■ The property, brokered through the Southern Tier Economic Growth Agency, was polluted from more than a century of heavy industry. Yet another generation would pass with countless questions about health risks and exposure before officials took a closer look. ■ Recent testing at the school, on South Main Street, confirms problems ignored long ago remain a very real problem today.

The story of Elmira High School is similar to thousands of sites statewide, including shopping centers, residential neighborhoods and municipal water districts.

They all are still managing often invisible risks from chemical hazards from a bygone era.

More than 30 sites in Chemung, Broome and Tompkins counties represent public health or environmental threats, according to a Press & Sun-Bulletin/pressconnects.com review of the state's database of Superfund and brownfield sites.

More than two-thirds of those involve TCE, a toxic and carcinogenic industrial solvent used liberally through much of the 20th century as a cleaning agent and grease stripper for products ranging from printed circuit boards to railroad locomotives.

Whether due to errors in judgment, willful ignorance or sheer naivete, chemical hazards were disposed of in the pre-regulatory era by dumping or flushing. Little thought was given to chronic spills from leaking industrial systems and leach fields.

Today, the results are hitting home. Nearly 1,000 residences, businesses and public buildings in the Southern Tier have been fitted with systems to prevent vapor intrusion. More affected properties near the old and often forgotten industrial sites are being found every year.

In Elmira, contractors last summer removed more than 6,500 tons of soil tainted by PCBs and other chemical hazards from under the school's tennis courts and south parking lot. Contaminated soil under the east



TOP: The former Morse Industrial Corp., presently owned by Emerson Electric, in Ithaca. TCE contamination has spread into neighborhoods north and west of the factory. KATE COLLINS/STAFF PHOTO
BOTTOM: Demolition of the polluted Remington Rand factory cleared the way for the Elmira High School in the late 1970s. FILE PHOTO

Winter reminds area it's still here

Anthony Borrelli
Ithaca Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

March roared into the Southern Tier like a lion Friday with a snow-storm that closed schools and businesses, caused widespread power outages, and rendered many roads treacherous.

A winter storm warning issued by the National Weather Service was scheduled to continue until 11 a.m. Saturday. Heavy, wet snow and gusty winds were the chief threats; they contributed to blowing snow conditions and downed trees or power lines.

Broome County Executive Jason Garnar declared a "state of emergency" Friday, until 6 a.m. Saturday. Residents were urged to use caution and only travel if necessary.

Travel bans were issued for the Towns of Deposit, Sanford, Windsor and Village of Deposit. Local and

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How push to cut costs led to trail of death

Christina Jewett and Mark Alesia
Kaiser Health News and Indianapolis Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

The surgery went fine. Her doctors left for the day. Four hours later, Paulina Tam started gasping for air.

Internal bleeding was cutting off her windpipe, a well-known complication of the spine surgery she had undergone.

But a Medicare inspection report says nobody who remained on duty that evening at the Northern California surgery center knew what to do.

In desperation, a nurse did something that would not happen in a hospital.

She dialed 911.

By the time an ambulance delivered Tam to the emergency room, the

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