
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kent County Health Department Update on Vapor Intrusion

GRAND RAPIDS - On May 19th, the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) was notified by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) of a severe tetrachloroethylene (PERC) vapor intrusion problem at 401 Hall SE (Red Project), 1168 Madison SE (Seeds of Promise), and 1170 #1 and #2 Madison SE (upstairs apartments). Toxicologists at DHHS informed KCHD that these vapors are the result of pollution caused by a commercial laundering/dry cleaning business which was located on that northeast corner of Hall/Madison for most of the 20th century.

This pollution, in the groundwater, slowly evaporates through the soil and into the buildings above. In response to the above information, KCHD issued an order on that same day, May 19th, under the authority of the Public Health Code (Act 368 of 1978) to prohibit occupancy at 401 Hall SE, 1168 Madison SE, and 1170 #2 Madison SE. 1170 #1 Madison SE was added to this order on May 20th when additional information was provided demonstrating that this apartment was also unsafe.

KCHD staff contacted the Red Cross to ensure that assistance would be available to any displaced residents. The Red Cross confirmed this and provided KCHD with necessary referral contact information. The Red Cross provided funds to the displaced individuals. The Kent County Health Department has worked with the Salvation Army and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to ensure that no resident who was displaced has been without safe housing. KCHD continues to work with residents to ensure their access to safe temporary accommodations. KCHD has assigned a social worker to work personally with the displaced residents on a daily basis and ensure that they are properly linked with resources. There are six confirmed residents who have been displaced by this event.

The executive directors of Red Project and Seeds of Promise were contacted by KCHD to discuss the problem and the need to close operations at their addresses until the problem is resolved. The Red Project is now operating at 343 Atlas Ave. SE. Grand Rapids and Seeds of Promise is Home Repair Services at 1100 S. Division, Grand Rapids. Contact for the Red Project is Steve Alsum (616)456-9063 or steve@redproject.org. Contact for Seeds of Promise is Ken Steensma 616-293-1097.

In consultation with DHHS and the Centers for Disease Control on May 19th, it was determined that collecting blood and urine samples from these exposed individuals (employees at the two non-profits and the upstairs residents) could provide valuable health data and would certainly provide baseline biometric data. KCHD arranged appointments at the 700 Fuller NE location for blood/urine collection. Taxi vouchers were made available for individuals who are transportation challenged.

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 265 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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The 28 individuals who work or live at these addresses presented themselves for testing. Those samples have been submitted to the CDC laboratory in Atlanta. Results are expected within three weeks. KCHD has also made arrangements with Spectrum Health's toxicology clinic to see these 28 exposed people and provide them with specialized consultation regarding their exposure.

The EPA is the lead agency investigating the situation. They will also be the lead agency in regards to remediation. Betsy Nightingale is the project manager. She can be contacted at 734-770-8402. She has also committed to creating a website with updates for the public and community meetings as appropriate. She is also providing summaries of the EPA actions and surveillance plans.

Officials with the City of Grand Rapids water department were contacted on May 20th in order to ensure that no dwellings in this neighborhood are relying on wells for their water supply. To date, the water department has not identified any sites that are not connected to the municipal water system.

KCHD's operational objectives at this point are:

1. Protect people from unsafe environments by monitoring the environmental data and issuing public health orders as appropriate
2. Provide medical guidance and clinical/laboratory assistance
3. Communicate important public health messages
4. Develop resource inventory and assistance for displaced individuals

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