

United States Environmental Protection Agency
EPA New England
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Boston, MA 02114-2023

February 10, 2000

Mr. Andrew T. Silfer, P.E.
Corporate Environmental Programs
General Electric Company
100 Woodlawn Avenue
Pittsfield, Massachusetts 0 120 1

RE: GE's January 7, 2000 Revised Estimated Timetable for the Upper ½-Mile Reach Removal Action; General Electric-Housatonic River Site, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Silfer:

EPA has reviewed your letter dated January 7, 2000 and the attached estimated project planning timetable for the Upper ½-Mile Reach Removal Action. The revised timetable was presented to EPA and discussed in a meeting held on January 5, 2000, as well as in subsequent conversations. EPA, after consulting with the Massachusetts DEP, has the following comments on this letter/estimated project planning timetable. EPA's comments regarding the completion date for the required construction activities are immediately below in this letter; other specific comments regarding GE's January 7, 2000 Revised Estimated Timetable are in the attachment to this letter.

In its January 7, 2000 Revised Estimated Timetable, GE provides a completion date in May 2001. However, in the accompanying letter, GE reiterated its position that the deadline for completion of the construction/removal work under the approved Work Plan is around June 30, 2001, if that should be necessary. EPA disagrees. EPA's position, based on the Consent Decree and the approved Work Plan for the Upper ½-Mile Reach, is that the enforceable completion date for the required construction activities (exclusive of final planting and restoration work on the riverbank) is May 31, 2001, not June 30, 2001. EPA believes the enforceable completion date is May 31, 2001, in part, because GE was in fact able to begin construction work in September 1999 but chose to wait until the Consent Decree was lodged. With that said, EPA recognizes that GE is not precluded from asserting a contrary position on this issue if it becomes apparent that GE will not complete the required construction activities (exclusive of final planting and restoration work on the riverbank) by May 31, 2001.

As you know, the Removal Action for the Upper ½ Mile Reach is a Time-Critical Removal Action under CERCLA. That being the case, prompt work to complete the project is vital. EPA recognizes that on a construction project such as this, delays could occur due to events arising from causes beyond the control of GE. At the same time, however, EPA, at our January 5, 2000 meeting, expressed our concerns about the overall schedule proposed by GE, and in particular, the amount of work proposed for April and May 2001, which are the final two months of the

schedule. While GE's revised schedule moved 320 feet of river excavation work into **January** 2001, EPA, as we have mentioned, continues to have major concerns that the April/May 2001 schedule contains so much work that there are insufficient contingencies to account for potential delays, particularly given the historically high flow conditions in April and May, and the presence of DNAPL and LNAPL plumes in the adjacent **riverbank**. In addition to this concern, EPA also expressed its view that GE's schedule should contain additional contingencies beyond GE's proposal to work, if necessary, in February **and/or** March 2001. These additional contingencies would help to compensate for the type of conditions that may result in delays (see the Attachment to this letter for more details). As we discussed in our January **5, 2000** meeting, should GE encounter delays, there are several actions GE can take to get back on schedule and meet the May 3 1,200 1 completion date. These include:

1. Working extended hours/days during conditions that are favorable to excavation;
2. Working in the proposed evaluation/shut down period in February and March of 2000, except of course when extreme weather jeopardizes worker safety; **and/or**
3. Increasing crew sizes and equipment resources.

Finally, consistent with the discussion at the recent Executive Board meeting, EPA believes it would be mutually beneficial to work together to achieve an expeditious completion of the Upper ½ Mile Reach work, and to coordinate the logistics of the Upper ½ Mile Reach completion with initiation of work in the 1 ½ Mile Reach.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (617) 918-1282 or (413) 236-0969.

Sincerely,


Dean Tagliaferro
On-Scene Coordinator

Attachment

Andrew J. Thomas, Jr., GE
Bill Home, GE
J. Lyn Cutler, MA DEP
Sue Steenstrup, MA DEP
Holly Inglis, EPA
Bryan Olson, EPA
Tim Conway, EPA
Ray Goff, **USACE**
Tom O'Brien, MA EOE
Cynthia S. Huber, U.S. Department of Justice
Public Information Repositories
Site File

Attachment

EPA Response to GE's January 7, 2000 Revised Estimated Tietable for the Upper ½ Mile Reach Removal Action; General Electric-Housatonic River Site, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

1. EPA recommends that GE anticipate and plan for, including giving strong consideration to the actions outlined in the cover letter, the following potential scenarios:

- The presence of DNAPL that requires additional excavation of sediments and/or bank soils. (Note that DNAPL has been observed in Cell C of the removal action, additional excavation was performed, and delays were incurred.)
- Conditions, such as unstable banks and "boils" in the sediments, that require additional excavation and stabilization activities. (Note: Over-excavation for unstable banks has occurred in both Cell A and Cell C and significant time delays were encountered in Cell C to address "boils".)
- High flow conditions that cause overtopping of the water diversion controls (i.e., sheetpiling). Note that GE proposes to conduct sediment and bank soil excavation in April and May 2000 and 2001. As stated in the ½-Mile Work Plan, historically, April has been by far the month with the highest daily average river flows. Page 7-3 of the ½-Mile Work Plan shows that the average high flow event in April is 685 cubic feet per second (cfs). GE's current water diversion methods are designed to prevent overtopping for river flows of 440 cfs or less. Therefore, it is likely that overtopping of the water diversion structures will occur in April 2000 and/or 2001 and that delays in construction may occur. Historically, May has been the month with the third highest average daily high flows. The ½-Mile Work Plan indicates that the average daily high flows in May are 351 cfs. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that there may be overtopping of the water diversion structures or other delays caused by high flows during May 2000 and/or 2001.
- High flow events may also occur in months other than April and May. Although other months of the year have historically had lower average daily flows than April and May, there is certainly the possibility that high flow events or other adverse weather conditions in these months could cause delays in construction schedules.
- There will likely be reduced efficiency and productivity in winter months.
- There will likely be some access restrictions and logistical difficulties that could adversely impact the construction schedule.
- There may be underground piping networks or infrastructure issues that could adversely impact the construction schedule.

2. GE proposed two potential evaluation periods during the course of construction activities. To the extent such evaluation periods occur, it would be constructive if GE submitted to EPA the outcome of GE's evaluations, a summary of "lessons learned," and proposed modifications to

work activities based on experience gained during the construction performed in the period prior to the evaluation period. Also, EPA expects that GE will shortly provide additional written procedures describing how GE will **confirm and** document that excavation limits specified in the **½-Mile** Work Plan have been achieved and that backfill/restoration activities were performed in accordance with the Work Plan.

3. GE did not indicate a completion date for riverbank restoration. Since, according to the **½-Mile** Work Plan, tree and shrub planting can only be performed during April, May, October and November, EPA's interpretation of the **½-Mile** Work Plan is that the overall enforceable construction complete deadline, including riverbank restoration, is November 30, 2000.

4. Line 52 of the estimated project schedule indicates that the task of "Planting, restoration Cells F, part of **G**" will be performed **from** June 30, 2000 through August 3, 2000. Since the **½-Mile** Work Plan specifies that the tree and shrub planting can only occur during April, May, October and November, EPA assumes this is an error, and that the planting portion of the restoration activities will be performed in October/November 2000.