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Fact Sheet

September 2003

Property Information **Railroad Avenue Superfund Site, West Des Moines, Iowa**

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS

Residents, real estate agents, and lenders have asked EPA questions about property transactions, effect of Superfund designation on property values, and potential liability for property that may be affected by the contamination at the Railroad Avenue Superfund Site (Site), in West Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa. This fact sheet is a response to those questions.

This fact sheet may be useful to:

- homeowners;
- renters;
- prospective property buyers;
- real estate professionals;
- lenders;
- title companies; and
- others that may be involved in property transactions

This fact sheet summarizes EPA's efforts to manage environmental contamination associated with the Railroad Avenue Site and our policies concerning residential property owners and Superfund sites. This fact sheet may be used by property owners as they sell their homes to disclose information about the Superfund site.

EPA HAS DETERMINED EXTENT OF CONTAMINATION AND WAYS TO ADDRESS IT

EPA's highest priority is to identify and manage potential health risks to people who live near the Site. We are closely monitoring the ground water contamination in the area of the Railroad Avenue Site and we have developed plans for long term ground water cleanup. We are addressing all known potential health risks. The ground water contains levels of a group of chemicals known as chlorinated solvents in amounts greater than determined to be safe by the Safe Drinking Water Act. Figure 1 shows the approximate boundaries of the ground water contamination.

The contamination in the ground water at the Site does not pose a risk to human health unless the water is ingested without treatment. EPA is unaware of any domestic water supply wells in the vicinity of the ground water plume, and therefore the risk of ingesting contamination through the drinking water should not be of concern. After extensive investigation, EPA has not identified areas of soil contamination that present a risk. Because of the lack of an identified health risk in the soils above the ground water, the contamination at the Site should not affect the marketability, value or use of properties overlying the contamination plume.

While the ground water in the plume is contaminated, it is important to note that this contaminated ground water is not

currently used as the source of drinking water for the community. The affected water supply wells have been taken off line and West Des Moines obtains its water supply from the many wells located outside of the contaminant plume.

EPA's preferred alternative for remediation of the plume would provide treatment to remove the contaminants from the ground water prior to further treatment in the West Des Moines Water Works before it enters the distribution system. The preferred remedy will also accelerate the removal of the contaminants from the aquifer. All of this work is being done under the Superfund program. The Superfund program addresses hazardous waste sites throughout the country.

EPA POLICY TOWARDS PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AT SUPERFUND SITES

In May 1995, EPA issued its "Final Policy Toward Owners of Property Containing Contaminated Aquifers." This policy addresses property owners' concerns about contamination that has migrated to their property in a ground water aquifer. It is EPA's policy that EPA will not take enforcement action against a property owner or require them to take on or pay for a response action where contamination has come to be located on or in a property solely as the result of subsurface migration in an aquifer from a source or sources outside the property. This policy is subject to certain conditions, mainly that the landowner did not cause or contribute to the release or threat of release of a hazardous substance. These assurances have since been codified at 42 U.S.C. § 9607(q).

Despite extensive investigative efforts, EPA has been unable to identify a source of the ground water contamination or a party responsible for its release. Based on the information available, it appears that properties that are contained within the Site boundaries qualify for the

protections provided by the Contaminated Aquifer Policy and 42 U.S.C. § 9607(q).

MORE INFORMATION AT THE LIBRARY AND OUR AGENCY'S OFFICE

Please visit the following locations, during normal business hours, for detailed information about the Railroad Avenue site.

West Des Moines Public Library
4000 George M. Mills Civic Parkway
West Des Moines, Iowa

EPA Region 7 Records Center
901 N. 5th Street
Kansas City, Kansas

If you have questions about this fact sheet or need additional information, please contact:

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