



## State has 3,000 toxic sites

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Special to the Record-Eagle

March 30, 2009 12:00 am

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LANSING -- About 3,000 sites throughout Michigan are seriously contaminated with industrial solvents, lead and other hazardous substances, but around 400 of them haven't been evaluated in more than five years, Department of Environmental Quality records show.

DEQ has the duty to evaluate toxic sites, but has been rapidly slowing the rate at which it inspects them, data shows.

In 2005, 554 sites were scored. In 2006, scorings fell to 470. Then 139 in 2007.

Last year: Just 38, according to DEQ records.

Department officials said the drop is mainly due to problems with funding cleanup programs.

"It's a resource issue. We're cutting everything back," said Robert McCann, DEQ spokesman.

There are several reasons why so many old entries are sitting on the list unchanged, in some cases dating back to 1990, according to department officials.

"There are some sites where there's just nothing going on. That doesn't even mean that contamination still exists. They may have done work and just not submitted it to our office," said Cheryl Wilson, an administrator at the department's Southeast District in Warren.

At the top of the list sit such sites as Rockwell International Corp. in Allegan, Sundstrand Heat Transfer in Dowagiac, the Manistique River Slips in Manistique, Van Deilen Industries in Petersburg, Florida Gas in Laurium, Deer Lake in Ishpeming and Consumers Power in Manistee.

As an example of an outdated entry, one Upper Peninsula site is shown as tied for third-most-contaminated, but was mostly cleaned up by the summer of 2007, according to the DEQ cleanup project manager.

Another DEQ official said limited resources mean that cleanup and other goals are more of a focus than keeping the list up-to-date.

"In general, we still get new information on new sites, but sometimes scoring is given a lower priority," said Rhonda Klann, with the DEQ's Saginaw Bay District office in Bay City.

In recent years, DEQ has allocated less and less money to cleanup and redevelopment efforts. In 2005, the

department projected that it would spend \$38.7 million on such projects. The new projection for 2009 is just \$15.3 million.

The department said that the sources of funding have nearly dried up. Two bonds passed in 1988 and 1998 have sustained programs until now, but that money has nearly been depleted, and efforts to put a new bond issue on the 2008 ballot failed in the Legislature.

"Had it gotten on the ballot, it most likely would have passed," said McCann. "There just wasn't that support in the Legislature."

Workers with the DEQ said that they are still finding ways to get cleanup done despite the budget crunch.

"We're continuing with the sites that already have their funding," said Klann, and are also focusing on persuading private parties to voluntarily clean up.

Wilson also mentioned using persuasion to get private owners to chip in.

"There are always people that want to do the right thing on their own. Then there are others that, unfortunately, no matter what we do, they just don't move. They require enforcement actions, all the way up to litigation," Wilson said.

**Thomas J. Morrissey writes for Michigan State University's Capital News Service.**

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