

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How are properties selected for testing and why isn't my property being tested?

Southern Union Company initiated the investigation of 68 private properties within the neighborhood based on the results of the investigation that EA Engineering did for the Town of Tiverton within, and around the roadways in the neighborhood. Based on the results of the initial Southern Union investigation results, seven additional properties were added to the original 68 properties based upon the discovery of contamination on abutting properties that brought the total number of properties to 75. Southern Union Company has completed an investigation of 67 properties, with the exception of one (1) property owner which gave permission after demobilization and six (6) property owners who were unresponsive to their request to access and sample. Additionally, EA Engineering investigated the playground on behalf of the Town of Tiverton and recently, the Department has requested that additional investigation work take place at the playground.

The Department of Environmental Management has requested that Southern Union Company begin preparing a Phase II site investigation of the remaining 17 private properties not previously tested which are within this area of concern.

The investigation performed by Southern Union was designed to expand if contamination is found on one property so that all the adjacent properties are investigated. In addition, if DEM receives other credible information that justifies expansion of the investigation, we believe the most effective approach is to first look in and around the roadways in these new areas of concern and make decisions on individual properties based on the results of that earlier investigation.

2. Why is it taking so long to get anything done?

A typical site investigation for a property usually takes approximately 5 months from Notification of a Release stage to issuance of a Remedial Decision Letter, which deems the site investigation complete. This is a complex site involving two performing parties (Southern Union and the Town of Tiverton), coordination with over 70 individual property owners, and consideration of sensitive populations who could potentially be exposed to contamination at a day care facility and playground, as well as in their yards. Addressing these complexities properly, and completely, adds time to the process.

3. What is being done?

The Town of Tiverton contracted with EA Engineering to investigate the nature and extent of contamination under and around the roadways in the neighborhood after contamination was discovered during construction of a sewer line. The results of that investigation, and other related information, suggested that some contamination may be present on residential properties in the community. Southern Union Company and their consultant agreed to investigate the residential properties near the areas where contamination was found in the roadways and public areas and is completing the Site Investigation Report for the majority of the residential properties. Southern Union Company has indicated to the Department that there will be five (5) actual site investigation reports submitted. The main report for the majority of the residential properties in question along with four (4) additional separate site investigation reports for four specific properties which Southern Union Company believes are impacted by wastes from other sources.

4. What do my test results mean?

Private meetings were held at the community center with each property owner to explain the results of the investigation on their property and allow residents the opportunity to discuss the results with an Health Department official, a Environmental Management official and a representative of the gas company's consulting firm. The RIDEM and RIDOH have developed a communications plan, with a goal of making sure that there are adequate opportunities and procedures in place to answer questions anyone might have.

5. Who can help me analyze my results?

Again, the public is encouraged to contact RIDEM or RIDOH concerning any questions in general or as they might relate to results. Tom Getz, the DEM Ombudsman should be contacted concerning general questions about the site. He can be reached at tgetz@dem.state.ri.us or 222-4700, extension 2417.

6. When is it going to get cleaned up?

The completeness of the Site Investigation Report and the willingness of a responsible party to fund the remediation will drive the schedule of future remedial actions. The Department hopes to continue this process cooperatively with other performing parties. However, if that is not the case, the State may be compelled to pursue other remedies through the legal system. This can be a time consuming process. If things do go in that direction, the Department will investigate other avenues for funding the response action and seek to recover costs in the future.

7. Will my property need additional testing?

One of the Department goals of reviewing the upcoming Site Investigation Report submittals will be to assess which sites the Department believes require further investigation. Based on the results of the review by DEM, DOH, and public comment, additional testing may be required.

8. Who is going to clean it up?

It has not been determined who is going to clean up areas of contamination which the Department believes require addressing. As stated above, the Department hopes to continue this process cooperatively with other performing parties. However, we are prepared to look at other alternatives if necessary.

9. What happens to my property value if my property is clean, but my neighbors is contaminated?

Typically, contaminated sites may have a negative affect on abutting properties; however, in this specific situation the long-term effect on the neighborhood has not yet been assessed.

10. How long will this take?

It is uncertain how long this investigation and subsequent remediation will completely take, however, in situations when responsible parties are cooperative; things seem to get completed on a much shorter timeline.

11. Who is responsible for making sure this is handled properly?

At this time, the RIDEM and the RI Department of Health are the lead agencies with Town of Tiverton and the neighborhood committee ENACT. Other assistance may be necessary from State and Federal Agencies as well as State Administration and Legislature. For instance, DEM and DOH have enlisted expert assistance for review of the risk assessment, which is expected to be a critical and complex technical document. In order to get the most complete and thorough review possible, DOH has tasked their technical support contractor to review the assessment and DEM has requested, and received, assistance from an EPA risk assessment expert to review the plan when it is submitted.