

EPA awards \$1B to clean up 22 toxic waste sites nationwide

By MATTHEW DALY, February 10, 2023

WASHINGTON (AP) — Projects to clean up 22 toxic waste sites across the country will receive \$1 billion from the federal Superfund program to help clear a backlog of hazardous sites such as landfills, mines and manufacturing facilities, the Environmental Protection Agency said Friday. The money is the second installment in \$3.5 billion appropriated under the 2021 infrastructure law signed by President Joe Biden. Sites targeted for cleanup include a lead-contaminated neighborhood on Atlanta’s Westside and a former dry cleaning solvents distributor in Tampa, Florida. The money also will be used to speed cleanup of 100 ongoing Superfund projects across the United States, the EPA said. The agency has vowed to clear a longtime backlog in the Superfund program, which was established in 1980 to clean up sites contaminated with hazardous substances. The program has languished for years because of a lack of funding. *(ed: Superfund, shorthand for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, was originally funded through taxation of corporations. This changed in 1995, when congress repealed the tax, resulting in the fund going bankrupt in 2003. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that polluters do not need to pay the full amount of cleanup. The culmination of all this history has resulted in fewer Superfund sites being recognized and cleaned up.)*



While the agency is moving faster to clean up contaminated sites in communities across the country, “our work is not yet finished,” EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement Friday. “We’re continuing to build on this momentum to ensure that communities living near many of the most serious uncontrolled or abandoned releases of contamination finally get the investments and protections they deserve.”

Of the new cleanup sites announced on Friday, 60% are in low-income or minority communities that are chronically over-polluted, Regan said. Thousands of contaminated sites exist across the country as a result of hazardous waste being dumped — often illegally — left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed, including in manufacturing facilities, processing plants, landfills and mining sites. Superfund cleanups help transform contaminated properties and create jobs in overburdened communities, while repurposing these sites for a wide range of uses, including public parks, retail businesses, office space, homes and solar power generation, EPA said.

Besides the Atlanta and Tampa projects, money also will go to a groundwater contamination site in Indianapolis, a former tannery in Danvers, Massachusetts, and a former metal stamping and tool and die shop near St. Louis. The funding also includes new cleanup of a former General Motors foundry in Upstate New York that has been on the Superfund list since 1984. The site in Massena has long been contaminated by toxic chemicals known as PCBs and other pollutants. In all, new projects in 14 states and Puerto Rico will receive funding, EPA said. About \$50 million will go to clean up lead contamination in a residential neighborhood in Atlanta. The Westside project has been waiting for years to access federal funds. Experts say it’s unclear exactly where the lead came from, but it is likely from metal foundries that were once common on Atlanta’s Westside. The cleanup money “couldn’t come soon enough,” Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., said on a conference call Friday with Regan and other officials. “This accelerated timeline would not be possible without this historic investment.”

Similarly, a project in Tampa was identified as a Superfund site in 1999 but remains contaminated, said Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Fla. The site is near where she and her husband got married, Castor said. In an apparent nod to Warnock’s status as a pastor, Castor said that while “it’s important to have faith, there’s nothing like having resources” to clean up pollution.

Article Questions:

1. What is the source of funding for the latest Superfund cleanups?
2. Why has there been a backlog of Superfund sites to cleanup?
3. How has this new funding influenced the work of the EPA?
4. Identify at least two pollutants from the Superfund sites described.
5. What happens to Superfund sites after they are cleaned up?