

# Press Release

Region 2 - New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands



## EPA Adds Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal to the National Superfund List of Hazardous Waste Sites; Agency will Pursue Polluters to Pay for Comprehensive Cleanup

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(New York, NY – Mar. 2, 2010) –The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced that it has officially placed the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn, NY on its Superfund National Priorities List of the country's most hazardous waste sites. Since EPA proposed the listing in April 2009, Agency officials have met with government and elected officials, business representatives, representatives of civic organizations, and community members, and reviewed more than 1,300 comments received on its proposal to list the site. The Agency has determined that adding the site to the Superfund list is the best way to clean up the heavily contaminated canal.

“After conducting our own evaluations and consulting extensively with the many people who have expressed interest in the future of the Gowanus Canal and the surrounding area, we have determined that a Superfund designation is the best path to a cleanup of this heavily contaminated and long neglected urban waterway,” said Judith Enck, Regional Administrator. “We plan to continue our work with the same spirit of inclusion and involvement that has already been demonstrated, and thank everyone for their focus on this pollution problem.”

The canal was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to allow industrial access into Gowanus Bay. After its completion in the 1860s, the canal became a busy industrial waterway, home to heavy industries, including manufactured gas plants, coal yards, concrete-mixing facilities, tanneries, chemical plants, and oil refineries. It also received untreated industrial wastes, raw sewage and

runoff.

Although most of the industrial activity along the canal has stopped, high contaminant levels remain in the waterway's sediment. The contamination affects the 1.8 mile length of the 100-foot wide canal. Environmental sampling has revealed that the sediment in the Gowanus Canal is contaminated with a variety of pollutants, including polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, heavy metals, pesticides, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), metals and volatile organic contaminants. The adjacent waterfront is primarily commercial and industrial, and includes concrete plants, warehouses, and parking lots, with proposed residential housing. The canal is also surrounded by residential neighborhoods. The waterway is still used for commercial as well as recreational purposes, and a public fishing area just downstream of the canal in Gowanus Bay is fished on a regular basis by local residents.

In January 2010, EPA completed a study of variations in depth for the entire length of the canal. During that same period, the Agency began sampling to characterize the contamination in the deep sediment of the canal. This sampling continues, and the Agency will soon begin sampling the surface of the sediment, the water in the canal and the air along the banks to provide information needed to complete an ecological and human health risk assessment. EPA has also identified locations where wells can be installed to monitor water under the ground near the canal. These wells will be used to locate the sources and any influence of contaminated ground water on the Gowanus Canal. The Agency plans to install the wells in early summer 2010.

Since April, the Agency has held over 50 meetings and telephone consultations with a broad range of people regarding the Superfund listing. The Agency will continue to work closely with all interested parties as it advances its work to turn the notoriously contaminated canal into a useable resource for all.

EPA has also held several meetings with the utility, National Grid, and New York City, both parties identified as potentially responsible for a portion of the site contamination, to discuss their participation in the ground water investigation. The Agency is continuing its efforts to identify additional potentially responsible parties.

As part of its commitment to keeping the public informed, EPA will hold its third general public meeting to discuss next steps with community residents and stakeholders on Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup> from 7 pm to 9 pm in the auditorium of P.S. 58, located at 330 Smith Street in Brooklyn.

To date, there have been 1,620 sites included on the Superfund list. Of these sites, 341 sites have been deleted, resulting in 1,279 sites remaining on the list. There are a total of 1,340 final and proposed sites around the country.

For more information on the Gowanus Canal, go to:

<http://www.epa.gov/region02/superfund/npl/gowanus/>. For a Google Earth aerial view of the Gowanus Canal: [http://www.epa.gov/region2/kml/gowanus\\_creek\\_and\\_gowanus\\_canal.kmz](http://www.epa.gov/region2/kml/gowanus_creek_and_gowanus_canal.kmz). (Please note that you must have Google Earth installed on your computer to view the map. To download Google Earth, visit <http://earth.google.com/download-earth.html>). Follow EPA Region 2 on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/eparegion2> and visit our Gowanus Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=195975002808>.

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