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NEW JERSEY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

**Statement of Findings
Ringwood, Passaic County
Ringwood Mines/Landfill Former Superfund Site Petition
March 24, 2005**

1. Introduction

On Friday, January 28, and Thursday, February 24, 2005, the Environmental Justice Task Force reviewed the November 15, 2004, Environmental Justice Petition (the EJ Petition) submitted by **the Ringwood Neighborhood Action Association (RNAA), Ringwood, Passaic County**. The EJ Petition was signed by 85 residents and workers (the Petitioners) of the Ringwood community. Many RNAA members are Ramapough Mountain Indians, an officially recognized tribe by the State of New Jersey. It should be noted that this Indian tribe has not been federally recognized. Historical information about Ramapough Mountain Indian Tribe can be found through the Department of State's Commission on American Indian Affairs, located on the Internet at:
http://www.state.nj.us/state/american_indian/index.html.

2. Background

According to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) December 1992 Fact Sheet:

The Ringwood Mines/Landfill Site in Ringwood Borough, Passaic County, New Jersey, is about 0.5 mile wide and 2 miles long. It consists of a series of abandoned mine shafts and pits, inactive landfills, and open dumps. The fact sheet notes that in 1982, Cannon Mine and Peter's Mine has been filled with garbage over the years and that Peter's Mine also contains paint sludge, solvents, and scrap metal. Several drums have been observed in the Cannon Mine. Soil, surface water, and ground water may be contaminated.

From the 1700s, Ringwood Mines was one of largest iron mining operations in the United States. The Mine closed in 1931. From 1967 until 1974, Ringwood Realty, one of the former owners, deposited waste products for Ford Motor Company including car parts, solvents, and paint sludges, on the ground surface and in abandoned mine shafts. In 1970, Ringwood Realty donated 290 acres in the southern portion of the Site to the Ringwood Solid Waste Management Authority, which began operating a permitted municipal disposal area in 1972. The landfill was closed by the State in 1976. In 1983 the federal government declared the area a Superfund site. In 1984, ground water monitoring wells were installed. From 1987-1990, Ford removes 7,000 cubic yards and 727 tons of paint sludge, plus 61 drums of toxic waste. In 1994, 11 years after its Superfund designation, EPA delisted the site and declared it clean.

The area around the Site is primarily residential, with about 50 residences located on or near disposal areas. Approximately 20 water supply wells draw water from the bedrock aquifer, which supplies a few residences and industries in the area. Approximately 13,000 people live in Ringwood Borough.

The Wanaque Reservoir provides drinking water to about 650,000 people. Ground water beneath the Ringwood Mines Site discharges to surface streams and the Wanaque Reservoir, located ½ mile southeast of the on-site sludge disposal area. Ringwood gets drinking water from Wanaque Reservoir, which is supplied by neighboring streams, two originating in the immediate vicinity of the mines; 10 wells are within 2 miles of the site, and one spring is less than 0.5 mile from the site. Additional information about the site can be found at the EPA's website: <http://www.epa.gov/Region2/superfund/npl/0200663c.htm>.

Recent Environmental and Public Health Protection Activities: Legal counsel for the residents submitted a petition to the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) in September 2003, requesting the ATSDR re-evaluate site conditions and residents' health concerns. This petition was accepted and health activities were initiated by the ATSDR in partnership with the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). The NJDHSS and ATSDR conducted a site visit in October 2003, and held two availability (AV) sessions in February 2004 to further identify residents' health concerns. At the AV sessions the community group, the Ringwood Neighborhood Action Association, made it clear that the area remained contaminated and noted numerous illnesses which they attributed to childhood exposures to contaminated sludge. The NJDHSS and ATSDR met with residents two additional times in the spring and summer of 2004, and have committed to developing a Public Health Assessment to address health and environmental exposures. On December 13, 2004, the Ringwood Neighborhood Action Association held a public meeting focused on the community concerns about the cleanup at the Ringwood Mines area, a former Superfund Site (see the attached map). The meeting was attended by several stakeholders including community residents, EPA Superfund Managers, ATSDR, NJDEP, DHSS, Ringwood Mayor Wenke Taule, legal counsel for the community and Ford and a representative from Senator Lautenberg's office, and the Edison Wetlands Association. On December 18, 2004 the NJDEP closed the public a section of a hiking trail in the 4,044-acre Ringwood State Park. The closed section of the park is part of the Superfund Site. Removal of sludge present in Ringwood State Park was initiated by Ford on January 7, 2005 and is currently underway.

3. Summary of the EJ Petition

In the EJ Petition, the petitioners state that approximately 550 people living in this area have been exposed to unsafe levels of toxins from the former Ringwood Mines Superfund site. The site was considered clean and was delisted by the EPA in 1994. However, according to the petitioners, extensive contamination remains. Toxic sludge is visible on residents' yards and surrounding land. The petitioners state that residents' health has been adversely impacted from exposure to the contamination at the site. The petitioners also indicate that during the past year the community has reached out to various agencies including the USEPA Region 2, ATSDR, NJDEP and NJDHSS requesting that the site be fully remediated and to have their health concerns addressed. The community states that to date the agencies have been slow to act.

The petitioners stated that through the Environmental Justice petition process, they hope to raise awareness of their community with public officials and Ford in order to bring about a proper cleanup and to have their health concerns and issues addressed.

4. Findings of the Environmental Justice Task Force

The Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) has found that the issues raised in the petition fall within the scope of Executive Order No. 96 and that action on the part of the EJTF can substantially contribute to efforts to address the issues raised in the November 15, 2004 petition

submitted by the Ringwood Neighborhood Action Association. In making this determination the EJTF has considered the Environmental Justice Advisory Council's recommendation to further this petition.

The Task Force would consider the following items for inclusion in a future Action Plan:

- The Environmental Justice Task Force supports a relisting of the Ringwood Mines area to the Superfund list and encourages the community to apply for a Technical Assistance Grant through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- The Task Force will continue to monitor this case closely;
- Encourage EPA to monitor the cleanup and to pay for NJDEP to audit the testing and cleanup of the site;
- Department of Health and Senior Services will continue to develop a public health assessment to identify human exposures to site related contaminants;
- The Task Force will encourage lead agencies to provide periodic updates on the Ringwood Mines clean-up to residents;
- Encourage EPA to execute a Memorandum of Understanding with the community to clearly define testing parameters, and expected and potential outcomes of the testing that is planned on private property.

Furthermore, the Task Force acknowledges this community's right to a thorough clean-up of the former Ringwood Mines Superfund site, which was delisted by EPA in 1994. The Task Force believes that original cleanup efforts were inadequate, and encourages Ford and EPA to conduct a thorough investigation and cleanup of this site.

The Task Force finds that State agencies involved in this case, have made extensive efforts to address community concerns. Furthermore, the Task Force believes that community-based solutions are a crucial first step in finding long-lasting remedies and encourages community residents to work with agency staff in finalizing plans for an Environmental Health Initiative (EHI). The NJDHSS looks forward to meeting with residents to discuss the EHI. To this end, the community must also be aware of the roles, statutory mandates, and resource availability of state and federal agencies.

The Task Force agrees with ATSDR and DHSS's prior commitment to re-evaluate earlier conclusions of the health assessment and that this re-evaluation will incorporate an analysis of cancer incidence and childhood blood lead levels, since both of these have been expressed as concerns by community members.

Furthermore, the Task Force requests the full cooperation of petitioners. If an Action Plan is approved, forthright and direct contact between the petitioners and agency staff members are a basic condition and foundation on which an Action Plan can be successfully implemented. Representatives of the communities, such as third-party technical advisors and/or legal counsel can and should be present during meetings; however agency staff must be able to interact directly with concerned citizens to ensure that issues are thoroughly understood.

The Task Force also finds that several issues warrant further evaluation, and thus recommends that the appropriate agencies meet with the petitioners to clearly define the focus of the petition, obtain feedback on proposed Action Plan items and propose that a public dialogue be held with involved agencies on a periodic basis to provide updates and to address the identified concerns.