EPA Proposes to Add Abandoned Landfill in Peñuelas, Puerto Rico to the Federal Superfund List [1]

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(New York, N.Y. – May 15, 2018) Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced its commitment to clean up six new sites by adding them to the Superfund program's National Priorities List (NPL) and proposing to add another three hazardous waste sites to the NPL. The PROTECO site in Peñuelas, Puerto Rico, which operated as a hazardous waste landfill, is one of the three sites being proposed for addition to the NPL. From 1975 through 1999, the landfill accepted a variety of wastes, including electroplating sludge, pesticides, and pharmaceutical and manufacturing waste from multiple sources. Groundwater under the site is contaminated with

mercury and solvents. PROTECO, the now defunct owner, closed the landfill in the 1990s, abandoned it in 2009, and has not conducted required maintenance or monitoring. Across Puerto Rico, community drinking water sources are monitored regularly to ensure the water quality meets drinking water standards.

"EPA is making tremendous progress accelerating sites through the entire Superfund remediation process and returning them to safe and productive reuse," **said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.** "Adding these sites to the proposed and final National Priorities List is the next step toward cleaning up these sites and creating a healthier environment for the affected communities."

"Adding this site to our Superfund list will give us the legal and technical tools we need to address contamination at this site and protect the Peñuelas community," **said Pete Lopez, EPA Regional Administrator**. "Agua es vida, water is life, and that is why we will aggressively work with the Commonwealth to address the uncontained waste sources and contaminated groundwater under the site."

"Once again, work between state and federal agencies is vital to benefit our citizens and offer them a better quality of life. We support the proposal for the inclusion of this site in the EPA's National Priorities List. By addressing contamination at sites like this old landfill, we will ensure the cleanup of the facility, bring social justice to the residents of Peñuelas and continue protecting human health and the environment," **said Executive Director of the Environmental Quality Board, Tania Vázquez-Rivera.**

The private and public drinking water supply wells surrounding the site may be threatened by contaminated groundwater underneath the PROTECO facility. EPA will first thoroughly investigate the site to determine the nature and the extent of the contamination and to develop an analysis of the most feasible ways to address it. There will be numerous opportunities in the Superfund investigation and cleanup phases for the local community to participate.

Academic research has shown that Superfund cleanups reduce birth defects within approximately 1 mile of a site as much as 25 percent. Cleanups also increase tax revenue and create jobs during and after cleanup. According to EPA data, 487 of the 888 Superfund sites cleaned up for reuse supported approximately 6,600 businesses in 2017. And these businesses' ongoing operations generate annual sales of $43.6 billion and employ more than 156,000 people who earned a combined income of $11.2 billion.

Background

Superfund, which Congress established in 1980, investigates and cleans up hazardous waste sites. The Superfund law directs EPA to update the NPL annually. Only sites added to the NPL are eligible to receive federal funding for long-term cleanup. Administrator Pruitt has set the expectation that there will be a renewed focus on accelerating work and progress at all Superfund sites across the country.

EPA adds sites to the NPL when contamination threatens human health and the environment and deletes sites from the NPL once all response actions are complete and all cleanup goals have been achieved. All of the six sites being added to the NPL were included in the most recent

proposed rule in January 2018, evidence of the EPA's commitment to expediting the Superfund process.

The NPL is one focus area of the Superfund Task Force Recommendations that were announced in July 2017 to improve and revitalize the Superfund program.

The Superfund Task Force Recommendations can be viewed at https://www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-task-force-recommendations [5]

For Federal Register notices and supporting documents for the final and proposed sites: http://www.epa.gov/superfund/current-npl-updates-new-proposed-npl-sites-and-new-npl-sites [6]

For information about Superfund and the NPL: http://www.epa.gov/superfund [7]

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