

Walla Walla gasoline spill and cleanup

Stillwater Holdings Chevron cleanup site



Emergency response

The Department of Ecology responded to gas odors in the basement of the Marcus Whitman Hotel in September 2023. Air quality testing identified potentially harmful vapors and gasoline in the basement. The hotel was evacuated immediately. Vapors were also detected in two nearby buildings.

For the next month, ventilation was required to reduce dangerous fumes, and gasoline-contaminated groundwater was pumped from the affected buildings. Once the threat to the community lowered in October, then the response shifted to remediation.

Based on sampling results, Stillwater Holdings Chevron was identified as the source of the spill. It continues to impact two neighboring properties. The owner, Stillwater Holdings, began negotiating with Ecology in early 2024 to clean up contaminated soil and groundwater.

Polluter is responsible by law

Under federal and state laws, polluters are responsible for responding to and cleaning up a spill. Underground storage tank owners and operators are required to maintain an insurance policy or another form of financial assurance at a minimum of \$1 million in liability coverage.

Stillwater Holdings' insurance policy includes up to \$1 million to cover potential spills and leaks. After being identified, the owner hired an environmental consultant and contractor to investigate and help create a cleanup plan. In November, the owner informed Ecology and local officials that they were working with their insurance company to fund and remove the leaking tank, and then clean up the contaminated soil.

Funding issues

Stillwater Holdings told Ecology that insurance funds were almost depleted on May 9. They said they could pay for little or no more work and expected Ecology to take on the remaining cleanup, including removing the leaking tank and other equipment.

At this time, Stillwater Holdings has not provided evidence that they have exhausted all financial means for conducting the cleanup. Generally, Ecology cannot use taxpayer funds to pay cleanup costs for private companies when they still have money available. Ecology may step in when:

- The entity responsible exhausts all financial means of conducting the cleanup,
- The entity is bankrupt, or
- The site has been abandoned.

Enforcement order updates

On June 18, Ecology issued an enforcement order that requires Stillwater Holdings LLC to complete emergency interim actions at the site. Ecology issued this enforcement order pursuant to the Model Toxics Control Act, RCW 70A.305.050(1). On Aug. 12, Ecology sent a follow-up letter requesting a written response to the enforcement order by Aug. 23. To date, Ecology has not received a response with Stillwater Holdings' plan to respond. Ecology is currently working to amend the enforcement order to include completion of a remedial investigation and feasibility study.

Recent Ecology sampling efforts

On Aug. 16, Ecology sampled indoor air in the 106 Building and the basement sumps in the 106 Building and the Marcus Whitman Hotel. On Aug. 20 and 21, Ecology sampled all site wells. Free product was observed in monitoring wells MW-5 and MW-6. Analytical results are pending and will be provided as soon as the results are available, likely the first week of September.

Ecology contracting updates

Ecology will continue to contract for pumping contaminated water from the Marcus Whitman Hotel and the 106 Building basement sumps, and mitigating vapor intrusion. In September, equipment located on the 106 Building property will be relocated to the Stillwater Holdings property. The equipment was initially placed on the 106 Building through a rental agreement between Stillwater Holdings and the 106 Building owner; however, due to non-payment, the lease was terminated.

Sump and vapor mitigation efforts must continue to ensure harmful and potentially explosive vapors do not accumulate again in the basements of the Marcus Whitman Hotel and the 106 Building and that contaminated water is properly handled. This work is initially funded by multiple sources, including the proviso funds from Ecology's Leaking Underground Storage Tank Recovery account and an interagency agreement with the Pollution Liability Insurance Agency. While Ecology has secured funds for these activities, they are the responsibility of the polluter under the enforcement order, and Ecology can attempt to recover costs. Contract negotiations for the permanent sump treatment system is ongoing.

What's next

Summer 2024

Contracting to conduct vapor and sump water mitigation.

Summer 2024 to early 2025

Contracting for structural assessment and design-level work for the permanent vapor and contaminated sump water mitigation; cost estimates for removal of underground storage tank system and contaminated soil.

2025

Redesign of vapor and water mitigation to remove equipment from Building 106 property. Public works contracting to conduct removal of storage tank system and contaminated soil. Additional contracting to design and install a groundwater pump and treat system.

2025-2026

Underground storage tank system removal, contaminated soil removal and disposal, groundwater pump and treat system installation.

2026-2036

Long-term operation and maintenance of vapor mitigation, sump water mitigation, and groundwater pump and treat system.

Questions?

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106 Building utility concerns

Concerns regarding a broken sewer line were provided via a letter from the owner of the 106 Building on Aug. 15. Based on these concerns, the City of Walla Walla completed a dye test Aug. 20, to check if there was a break in the sewer line. The city found that water discharging from the sink is discharging to Rose Ave., not 2nd Ave., indicating the system is functioning as it should.

Access agreements

Ecology is continuing negotiations with the owner of the 106 Building to secure an agreement that is acceptable to both parties.

Stillwater Holdings planned activities

Starting Sept. 3, Stillwater Holdings is planning to remove old product lines and dispensers and install new dispensers and product lines. This action is not part of the requirements under Ecology's enforcement action.