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Environmental study of historical gas plant site begins with drilling, sampling in Boulevard Park

BELLINGHAM – A truck hauling a drill rig will roll into Boulevard Park on Monday to begin collecting soil samples at the South State Street Manufactured Gas Plant cleanup site.

The work marks the beginning of a comprehensive environmental study required by a recently completed legal agreement between the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), Bellingham city government and Puget Sound Energy (PSE).

Herrenkohl Consulting and Landau Associates are doing the work for the city and PSE. Ecology is overseeing cleanup activities at the site under the state cleanup law, the Model Toxics Control Act.

The field work is scheduled to continue through mid-September 2010. Expect to see workers using drill rigs, hand augers, boats and a barge to collect samples.

Crews will collect soil, soil vapor, groundwater, surface water and sediment samples. They will analyze samples to identify the location and concentration of contaminants. The samples are expected to turn up petroleum hydrocarbons, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, petroleum hydrocarbons, heavy metals and a combination of benzene, toluene and xylene.

After the work is complete, Ecology, the city and PSE will evaluate cleanup methods. In about a year, Ecology will invite the public to comment on the results of the study and evaluations.

The site is about 6 acres at the north end of Boulevard Park. The area where a manufactured gas plant operated from the 1890s to the late 1940s was contaminated. The plant made gas from coal for home heating and cooking.

Areas of the park will be closed to the public during this work. The city will post park and trail closures with signs and online at www.cob.org.

The South State Street Manufactured Gas Plant site is one of 12 cleanup sites in the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot, a multi-agency collaborative effort to integrate cleanup, control of pollution sources, habitat restoration and land use. The pilot is a major step toward restoring Puget Sound, and it is a model for other large-scale cleanup initiatives.

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For more information:

- Sampling work plan: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/blhm_bay/sites/S_State_St_MGP/s_state_st_mgp.htm
- City of Bellingham: www.cob.org