

Posted: May 8

Updated: Today at 6:19 AM

South Windham's Keddy Mill added to list of Superfund sites

Federal regulators will now launch an environmental review to identify the responsible parties and get them to pay for the cleanup.

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A former mill in South Windham has been added to the federal list of Superfund sites for hazardous waste cleanup, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday.



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The former Keddy Mill off Depot Street in Windham has been added to a national list of hazardous sites that are cleanup priorities.

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The Keddy Mill was one of seven sites across the nation that were added to the National Priorities List of Superfund sites.

Superfund is the federal program that investigates and cleans up the most complex, uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous-waste sites.

The site of the Keddy Mill, which once made paper and later made steel flanges, contains an estimated 55,000 tons of material contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs, from oils

used in turning machines and contained in metal filings that were buried on the site.

PCBs have been shown to cause cancer and have other adverse health effects in animals and potentially in humans, according to the EPA.

“I don’t think anyone who lives in Windham wants to have their town listed on a Superfund site because it conjures up this image of a huge, industrial wasteland,” Town Manager Tony Plante said Thursday night.

But Plante said the federal designation is good news for South Windham and the Little Falls neighborhood in Gorham – the two villages are bisected by the Presumpscot River – because it could lead to a cleanup of the mill site by the previous owner.

Plante said Windham has been working with residents of the neighborhood since the 1990s on a revitalization plan that would feature single- or multi-family homes, and shops.

The EPA will now begin an extensive environmental review and start trying to determine which parties were responsible for the contamination to get them to pay for the cleanup.

Plante gave an estimate of \$10 million to clean up the Keddy Mill property.

Windham’s Economic Development Director Tom Bartell has said the cleanup might not happen for another 10 years, depending on when money becomes available.

The mill closed 40 years ago.

“It’s a process that will likely take some years to complete,” Plante said. “I wouldn’t want to get peoples’ hopes up.”

David Tobin, 82, has lived all his life within “a stone’s throw” of the Keddy Mill. His great-grandfather was a foreman on the crew that built the mill.

Tobin, a former town councilor and state legislator in Windham, said he doesn’t mind waiting a bit longer for good things to happen at the 7-acre site off Depot Street. He prefers that the Keddy Mill be converted into a park but realizes that might not be the best use.

“That mill has been a black mark on our neighborhood. If we can get this straightened out, it would be a good thing for us,” Tobin said.

Other sites added to the Superfund list Thursday are a former oil refinery in Arkansas, two ground water plumes in Nebraska, a former chemical manufacturer in New Jersey, a former metal extraction facility in New York and a former machine screw products manufacturer in Tennessee.

Staff Writer Dennis Hoey contributed to this report.

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