

Site Investigation & Waterline Extension Frequently Asked Questions January 2025

Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a new study at the American Thermostat Superfund site in December 2023 and held a community meeting to discuss the planned work in July 2024. While there were a few questions from residents about the study during the meeting, most of the questions and comments were related to water supply concerns. Specifically, several Country Estates Mobile Home Park residents expressed interest in being connected to the existing public water supply (waterline) and others expressed concerns about the safety of their water.

Since that time, the EPA has been working cooperatively with the Village of Catskill, Town of Catskill, Town of Cairo, Greene County, New York State Department of Health, or NYSDOH, and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, or NYSDEC, to extend the Village's waterline to residents that are affected or potentially affected by contamination from the American Thermostat site.

This document provides an update on EPA and New York State activities and responds to frequently asked questions from community members.

EPA and New York State Actions at the Site

New York State (NYSDEC/NYSDOH) and the EPA have both been working at the site but have different roles.

What is the EPA Doing Currently?

Investigating the site property to see if there are remaining sources of contamination that need to be addressed.

For more than 25 years, the EPA, and then the NYSDEC, have been pumping and treating groundwater contaminated with volatile organic compounds, or VOCs,¹ from beneath the site property and off-property areas where the contaminated groundwater flows. Because the level of contamination in the groundwater underneath the site property has not decreased significantly during this time, the EPA believes that there could be contamination remaining in the soil on the site property that is impacting the groundwater. The EPA has begun a new study at the site property and will take the necessary steps to address any contamination that is found.

The study, which includes collecting soil and groundwater samples on the site property and beneath the on-property building, was originally expected to begin in spring 2024. The study was delayed because the EPA's contractor found asbestos in the floor tiles in the building. The floor tiles have to be removed before the contractor can drill through the floor to collect soil samples. The field studies are now expected to begin in spring 2025. The EPA anticipates that these studies, which will include evaluating options to address any contamination that is found, will take 3-5 years to complete.

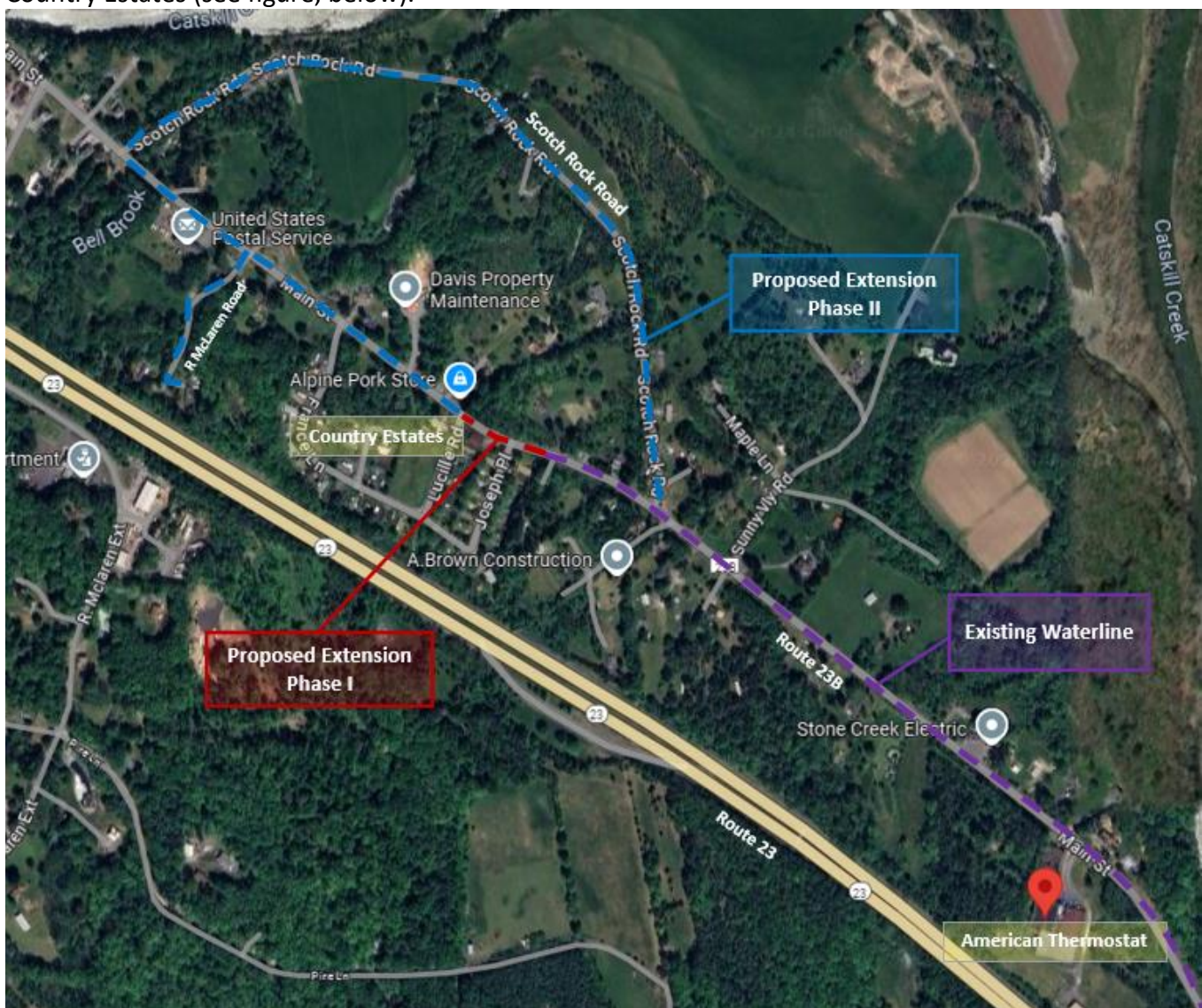
¹ VOCs are organic chemicals that evaporate easily. As part of the American Thermostat plant's operations, VOC solvents, such as tetrachloroethylene, or PCE, and trichloroethylene, or TCE, were used to clean plant machinery. Their improper disposal resulted in the contamination of the groundwater.

After the studies are finished, the EPA will prepare a cleanup plan that will summarize the findings of the investigation and will include a proposed cleanup approach.

Working to obtain funding to extend the Village of Catskill’s waterline to Country Estates Mobile Home Park and to any other affected and potentially affected homes.

The EPA determined that extending the waterline to Country Estates and any other affected and potentially affected homes can be addressed under the federal Superfund program.

As the provider of drinking water in the area, the Village of Catskill will be responsible for designing and constructing the waterline extension. To perform the extension work most efficiently, taking into consideration the anticipated schedule for future federal funding, Greene County provided money to the Village to perform the first phase of the design of the waterline. Phase 1 covers the less complex part—extending the existing waterline to Country Estates. The owner of Country Estates has agreed to connect to the waterline. Phase 2 will include a waterline loop that begins at Country Estates, then goes to and around Scotch Rock Road, to and around Route 23B to R McLaren Road, and then back to Country Estates (see figure, below).



Proposed Phase 1 and Phase 2 waterline extensions

It is anticipated that the EPA will provide funds to the Village to perform the Phase 2 design and for the construction of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 waterlines.

What are the New York State Department of Health/New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Doing Currently?

Operating and maintaining the groundwater extraction and treatment system.

Since 2008, the NYSDEC has been operating and maintaining the EPA-installed groundwater extraction and treatment system to address the contaminated groundwater underneath the site property and in areas where contaminated groundwater flows away from the site property. The NYSDEC continues to monitor the contamination in the groundwater.

Sampling well water at homes near the site.

Groundwater in the area flows to the northwest from the site property toward Country Estates and Scotch Rock Road. The NYSDOH offered drinking water well testing to homeowners in the “area of interest” after the EPA community meeting in July 2024 in response to water quality concerns by residents. The NYSDEC sampled seventeen residential drinking water wells along Route 23B (west of Country Estates) to Scotch Rock Road in August 2024, in coordination with the NYSDOH and the Town of Cairo. The results from one residential well, which had historically been impacted by contamination from the site, showed VOCs above state and federal drinking water standards. This well had not had elevated VOC concentrations in its water since 2006. Based on the results of the sampling, the NYSDEC restarted regular monitoring and maintenance of the existing water treatment system on this well, which it had suspended several years ago. Three other wells in the area showed the presence of contamination, but at levels below state and federal drinking water standards.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Questions about the New EPA Site Investigation

Does the new investigation at the site mean that the contamination has spread or is impacting new areas?

Every 15 months, the NYSDEC collects groundwater samples from monitoring wells located both on the site property and in areas where contaminated groundwater flows away from the site property. The sampling continues to show elevated levels of VOCs in the groundwater both on the site property and off-property areas where the contaminated groundwater flows but does not show that the contamination is spreading. The focus of this investigation is the site property itself and whether there are remaining sources of contamination in the soil that could be contributing to the prolonged contamination of the groundwater.

Can all the contaminated soil on the American Thermostat site property be removed to prevent the contamination from spreading in the groundwater?

Between 1993 and 1996, the EPA dug up 38,314 cubic yards of contaminated soil at the site property, thermally treated it to remove VOC contamination, and used the treated soil as backfill in the excavated areas. The EPA also installed a system to collect and treat on- and off-site property contaminated

groundwater. The groundwater treatment system has been operating for more than 25 years.

The new study will be looking at whether there are remaining sources of contamination on the site property in the soil and, if found, what to do about it.

Questions about Impacts to Drinking Water

Are private wells impacted by contamination from the American Thermostat site?

The EPA found VOC contamination in two water supply wells at Country Estates and three private residential wells along Scotch Rock Road in 1998. All of these wells were located beyond (or outside) the area where the EPA detected groundwater contamination previously. The EPA installed water treatment systems, called Point of Entry Treatment, or POET, systems on these five wells. The EPA, and then the NYSDEC, maintained the POET systems at the homes with the individual wells until 2022. Because sampling results showed that the well water at these homes met drinking water standards (since 2013), the NYSDEC determined that the treatment systems were no longer necessary. Homeowners with the POET systems could keep the treatments systems in place if they wished, but the responsibility for maintaining the POET system was transferred to the individual property owners (the NYSDEC removed one of the treatment systems before that time).

During regular monitoring of Country Estates' well in 2022, the property owner reported VOC contamination above state and federal limits for drinking water. New York State attributed the exceedance to a lack of maintenance of the carbon component of the treatment system. The NYSDEC subsequently changed the carbon and began operating and maintaining the treatment system.

As a community water supply, the NYSDOH oversees Country Estates' compliance with state rules and regulations. This includes reviewing water monitoring data and maintenance information from its treatment system.

The NYSDEC found contamination above New York State limits in 2024 in one of the Scotch Rock Road residential wells where contamination was found previously. Based on the sampling results, the NYSDEC reinstated regular monitoring and maintenance of the treatment system at the home.

How do the agencies know that the groundwater contamination that flows beyond the site property is not continuing to spread?

The NYSDEC periodically collects samples from monitoring wells located on the site property and in off-property areas where the contaminated groundwater flows to track the groundwater contaminant plume and monitor the progress of the cleanup effort. A groundwater contamination plume is the area where contaminants have dispersed in the groundwater.

The EPA has not determined why the Country Estates well and one private well have become re-contaminated, but based upon the results of samples collected from 17 residential drinking water wells along Route 23B and Scotch Rock Road in August 2024, it does not appear that the groundwater contaminant plume has migrated beyond the two wells that are contaminated (one public water supply well in Country Estates and one residential well). Three other wells in the area showed the presence of contamination, but at levels below state and federal drinking water standards.

What is the status of the plan to extend the waterline?

The EPA will provide funds to the Village to perform the design work for Phase 2 (the waterline loop). The federal government uses cooperative agreements as a mechanism for providing federal funds to non-federal recipients. In November 2024, the Village of Catskill submitted a cooperative agreement application to the EPA to obtain funds to design Phase 2; the application is under review by the EPA. It's anticipated that these funds will be awarded in the coming months. The EPA expects that funds for the construction of Phase 1 (connecting Country Estates to the waterline) will be awarded after the design is approved.

In the meantime, Country Estates and one private home have treatment systems on their water supply wells. The NYSDEC will continue to oversee the operation and maintenance of the treatment systems until the waterline extension is completed.

Residents who have specific questions about the design and construction of the waterline should contact Matt Davis with Delaware Engineering (Village of Catskill's engineering company) at (518) 452-1290 or mdavis@delawareengineering.com.

Who is eligible to connect to the new waterline?

Any residents with private wells that currently have American Thermostat site-related contaminants in them or private wells that have the potential to become contaminated in the future are eligible to be connected to the new waterline. The Town will notify all the affected and potentially affected residents.

How will the Village collect its water usage fees from the new water customers in Country Estates?

The Village determines its water usage fees based on water meter readings. Residential and commercial customers typically receive quarterly water bills from the Village. For Country Estates, there will be a master water meter and each residence will have an individual water meter. The Village will bill the owner of Country Estates for the total amount of water used. The owner will then divide the charge between the park tenants based on the amount of water the individual tenant used. There will also be a maintenance fee for the water meters and their associated software. This fee will likely be included in the tenant agreement. For questions related to water usage and billing, please contact the Village of Catskill Water Department at (518) 943-3830.

Other Questions

What are the exposure concerns associated with contamination from the site?

The EPA evaluated site-related potential exposure pathways in the air, soil, and water and performed cleanup actions which prevent contact with site-related contaminants. If residual soil contamination is found (the purpose of the ongoing study), people may come into contact with contamination by digging in the soil. Soil vapor intrusion, which is a process by which chemicals from contaminated soil or groundwater move into the air inside buildings, is not a concern for the vacant on-property building or off-property buildings, which are currently occupied. However, the potential exists for the inhalation of site contaminants through soil vapor intrusion in the on-property building if it is reoccupied or redeveloped. Contaminated groundwater at the site is not used for drinking or other purposes and the site area is served by a public water supply that obtains water from a different source not affected by this contamination. Additionally, the NYSDEC and the NYSDOH have taken actions to address potential

exposure via private wells, and monitoring will continue to ensure that no further actions are needed as connection to the public water supply extension (waterline) continues.

Has cancer in the area been evaluated?

NYSDOH records show more cases of lung cancer than expected over a broad area along the Hudson River from Selkirk to Hudson, including South Cairo. However, the NYSDOH has no information suggesting an association between pre-cleanup exposure to VOCs from the American Thermostat site² and lung cancer cases over this broad area. Additional information about how the NYSDOH responds to cancer concerns can be found at: [Concerned About Cancer in Your Community?](#)

Can affected property owners seek reduced property taxes?

If a property owner believes that their property has gone down in value due to its location in relation to the American Thermostat site, they should consult with their local property taxing authority about tax relief options.

Can the American Thermostat site ever be redeveloped?

The cleanup plan that the EPA selected in 1990 included, among other things, decontaminating the building on the site property. The intent was for the building to be available for reuse after the other elements of the cleanup were completed, which included removing and treating the contaminated soil on the site property and constructing the groundwater extraction and treatment system.

The property is currently privately owned. The owner is free to redevelop the property as long as it is consistent with current zoning requirements and does not interfere with the operating groundwater treatment system or the ongoing investigation at the site.

When will there be another informational meeting to hear from and meet with officials?

It is anticipated that there will be a public meeting that will include all of the involved agencies and municipalities before the construction of the waterline begins. The EPA may hold additional meetings to provide updates as the new study continues and when project milestones are reached. General project information, project documents and updates are available on the EPA site webpage:

www.epa.gov/superfund/american-thermostat.

In the meantime, residents who have questions about the Superfund site work can reach out to the EPA Community Involvement Coordinator or Project Manager for the site. Health-related questions or concerns should be directed to the NYSDOH. See contact information below.

Background

The American Thermostat Co. built thermostats for small appliances at an eight-acre manufacturing facility from 1954 to 1985. As part of the facility's operations, volatile organic compounds such as PCE and TCE were used to clean plant machinery. The NYSDEC discovered that American Thermostat employees were improperly disposing of these chemicals at the facility in 1981, which contaminated the soil and groundwater. The EPA placed the site on the National Priorities List in 1983.

² Exposure to contamination in the groundwater and soil were eliminated with the construction of the water line in the 1980s and the treatment of the contaminated soil on the site property in the 1990s, respectively.

In 1988, after completing a study to evaluate alternate water supplies, the EPA selected a plan that called for extending the existing Village of Catskill water district pipeline to the affected and potentially affected areas. The EPA finished constructing the 3.5-mile water pipeline and connected 52 homes in 1992. The extended waterline ended approximately 400 feet from Country Estates. Country Estates was not included in the waterline extension work because the owner at the time did not provide consent.

The EPA selected a cleanup plan for the overall site in 1990. The elements of the plan included decontaminating the former manufacturing building; digging up the contaminated soil, thermally treating it, and using the treated soil as backfill in the excavated areas; and constructing and operating a groundwater extraction and treatment system to address the contaminated groundwater on the site property and off-property areas where the contaminated groundwater flows. The EPA conducted the cleanup work from 1992 to 1998. The EPA operated the groundwater extraction and treatment system and conducted groundwater monitoring at the site from 1998 to 2008; in 2008, the NYSDEC assumed these responsibilities.

Contacts

For questions related to the site investigation and monitoring:

EPA (site investigation):

Claudia Shuman, Remedial Project Manager, shuman.claudia@epa.gov or (212) 637-4279

Larisa Romanowski, Community Involvement Coordinator, romanowski.larisa@epa.gov or (518) 407-0400 ext. 2

NYSDEC (site management):

Charles Gregory, Charles.Gregory@dec.ny.gov or (518) 402-8246

For questions about the waterline extension:

Village of Catskill (waterline extension):

Matthew Davis, Delaware Engineering, mdavis@delawareengineering.com or 518-452-1290

For site-related health questions:

NYSDOH:

Angela Martin, Angela.Martin@health.ny.gov or (518) 473-4671

Stay Informed

EPA:

Project Listserv:

If you would like to join the EPA email Listserv to receive updates on the American Thermostat Superfund site, send an email to romanowski.larisa@epa.gov.

Project documents and updates are available on the EPA site webpage:

www.epa.gov/superfund/american-thermostat

NYSDEC:

DEC Delivers

Sign up to receive site updates by email: www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/61092.html

DECinfo Locator

Use the NYSDEC's interactive map to access NYSDEC documents and public data about the environmental quality of specific sites: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/109457.html>

For more information about State Superfund sites, visit:

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8439.html>