

# State cleaning up underground gas tank contamination near Deer Lake

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BOYNE CITY — State environmental officials are spending about \$450,000 to clean up contamination at the former site of a leaking underground gasoline storage tank.

Work at the site of the former Clares Country Corner gas station on Boyne City-East Jordan Road near Deer Lake Road, began earlier this month and is expected to wrap up by the end of November.

Elaine Pelc, a project manager with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's Gaylord office said the contamination came from any of six underground gasoline storage tanks that were installed at the site from 1971 through 1982.

Pelc said the contaminator was discovered when the tanks were removed in 1994. She said some initial cleanup took place at the time the tanks were removed, but the owners didn't have enough money to pay to complete the cleanup work.

"In Northern Michigan it's very typical to have these old mom-and-pop stations," Pelc said. "They were able to do some work at the time (of the tank removal), but the costs are so significant, that an average person can't afford anymore."

She said in these situations, the DEQ steps in and looks at any type of "pathway" the contamination might find that would pose a risk to people.

The remaining contamination lingered until 2012 when the DEQ installed monitoring wells at the site and nearby. As crews checked those wells, they discovered that the contamination, which was near the former building site, had begun to migrate north toward and along the road.

Pelc said testing has shown the contamination had not yet made it to Deer Lake or the nearby Deer Creek, but she said the proximity of those two water sources is what prompted DEQ officials to make the site a priority for clean-up. She said no nearby home water sources are threatened by the contamination.

Pelc said the work will involve excavating to about 13 feet below the surface and de-watering the area. She said the water table in the area is about six or seven feet below the surface. De-watering involves a special system in which the water is pumped out of the excavation site, through a charcoal filtration system and then it is discharged into nearby Deer Creek after filtration.

"The goal is to remove the lion's share of the contamination in the soil and groundwater," Pelc said.

The cleanup will be paid for through money in the state's Refined Petroleum Fund. Money in the fund comes from a 7/8th of a cent per gallon environmental fee that is levied on all refined petroleum products sold in Michigan.

Pelc noted that there are thousands of sites like the one on Boyne City-East Jordan Road across Michigan and in many cases there is no liable party to pay for the clean-up. That means it's up to the state to take care of the work.

"Each one of these has different risks as coated with it. It's a matter of triaging them," she said.

There are currently 29 leaking underground storage tank contamination sites in Charlevoix County that are listed as “open” with the DEQ and 50 that have been closed (clean-up work has been completed.)

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#### The Refined Petroleum Fund

— Money in the fund comes from a 7/8th of a cent per gallon environmental fee charged on all refined petroleum products sold in Michigan

— The money is used to clean up contamination from leaking underground fuel storage tanks where there is no liable party to pay for the work

— Over the past five years the fund has collected an average of about \$51.3 million annually.

— State officials estimate that there are currently about 8,500 “releases” from leaking underground storage tanks at about 6,700 different sites in Michigan that still need to be cleaned up. Officials estimate that about half are considered orphan sites (no liable party). The cost to the state to clean up these orphan sites is anticipated to be approximately \$1 billion.

— Source: March 2015 Michigan House of Representatives Fiscal Agency legislative briefing