Problem Solved?

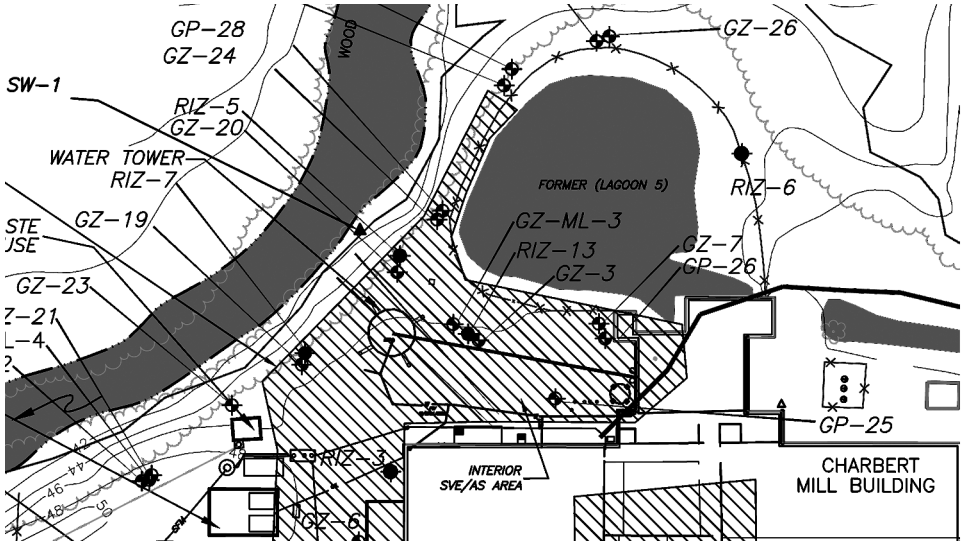
Residents Work to Make Sure Clean-Up is a Success

Sylvia Broude

The lagoons in the small town of Alton, Rhode Island, were large. Picture four football fields of wastewater giving off smells that caused nausea, breathing problems, and head-aches.

For years, neighbors suffered from the effects of Charbert Dye Company's operations. Neighbors formed a group and, with help from Toxics Action Center, they asked for and got testing. They learned the hydrogen sulfide levels were so high they violated the state's air pollution regulations. In 2004 the Department of Health recommended that residents stop using well water for drinking, cooking, or bathing infants.

Working with the state to get Charbert Dye Company to clean up its land was a slow process. Then Charbert shut down in 2008 due to overseas competition. Charbert hired GZA Environmental to clean-up the site. The company submits quarterly reports that are 100s of pages long, but it is hard to tell if the clean-up is working. See the test results on p. 29. What would you think if you lived in this community? Is the clean-up sufficient?



Here is a map of the area northeast of the Charbert Mill Building. The arrows point to places where water samples were taken. Find samples GZ-19 and GP-28. Then read the tables on the next page to see what researchers found in those water samples. The table for GZ-19 has explanatory notes. We have left GP-28 for you to interpret. Tips for reading and interpreting the tables are below.

Sylvia Broude is the organizing director of Toxics Action Center. For more practice, see "Assessing Conditions Using Maps" and "Assessing Conditions by Comparing Levels" in SfA's Manual.

Making Sense of the Tables: Step by Step

Tips for Reading the Tables

1. Look for the contaminant names on the left.
2. Look across the top for the dates.
3. Find the column with the levels for the clean-up objectives.
4. Find the unit.

Tips for Interpreting a Table

1. Locate the well. Is it next to a river, a known spill, or near homes?
2. Compare the amounts with the clean-up objectives. Make a graph to get a sense.
3. Find the highest and lowest levels. How do they compare over time?