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From: David Powers  
Communications Director  
708.358.5781

Contact: Lisa Shelley  
Assistant to the Village Manager  
708.358.5777

### **No Severe Contamination Found on Barrie Park Neighborhood Residential Properties**

Owners of property adjacent to Barrie Park began receiving the test results of soil samples gathered from their yards, and none showed any evidence of severe contamination.

Twelve of the 28 yards tested had results that exceeded levels established by the Village and utility companies as benchmarks above which the property would qualify for clean up. However, levels of contamination were relatively low and present no known health risks to the residents. Results from the other 16 residential properties tested were below the trigger levels, or remediation objectives, as they are officially known.

"We breathed a collective sigh of relief as the analyses of the samples began to come in," said Georgeen Polyak, PhD., director of the Oak Park Department of Public Health. "The levels that exceeded the criteria were all found at shallow depths and actually are within the range of what one might expect to find in an urban environment."

Thirty-four residential properties actually were eligible for testing, but only 28 were sampled. Two property owners declined to participate and numerous attempts to contact the owners of the remaining four properties were unsuccessful.

Tom Hahne of Tetrattech EM, Inc., the Village's environmental consultants, echoed Dr. Polyak's statements, adding that samples exceeding the remediation objectives did not appear to indicate widespread contamination or the presence of any source material such as that in the park itself, once the site of a plant where coal was processed into gas for heating, lighting and cooking. Operations at the Oak Park facility ceased in 1928, but byproducts of the process have been found in the park soil.

"Contaminants identified on residential properties were found only at shallow depths and none of the samples collected from deeper depths identified contaminants above the remediation objectives," Hahne said. "Further, there is no evidence of gross contamination such as would be expected if dumping had occurred in what is now the residential property."

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Initial negotiations with the utility companies had established an existing “background” level of the compounds as a basis for determining when properties would be eligible for cleanup. The compounds in the soils are polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, which are byproducts of fossil fuel oxidation, similar to those in automobile exhaust.

Results from the tests of the property adjacent to the park, designated as Area 1, will determine if testing moves to residential property that abuts those yards where samples exceeded the remediation objectives. Based on the current data, as many as 28 Area 2 properties could be eligible for testing. Since yards adjacent to untested property are automatically eligible for sampling, the number of eligible Area 2 properties could decrease if Area 1 property owners who did not have their yards sampled choose to do so now that their neighbors’ results are in.

Before sampling proceeds to eligible Area 2 properties, Commonwealth Edison and Nicor Gas, the firms responsible for the clean up, must review the data and issue a report summarizing the overall results of the sampling. The report is expected to be issued in January and presented in a public meeting scheduled for 7 p.m., Wednesday, January 10 at a site to be determined. Additional public meetings will be scheduled for Area 2 residents to learn more about how the process now will affect them.

Meanwhile, negotiations are continuing between the Village, Park District and utility companies on the details of the park cleanup, according to Village Manager Carl Swenson.

“Ensuring that the cleanup proceeds in a way that protects the health, safety and property of the residents has required an extraordinary level of diligence and, unfortunately, time,” he said. “We understand that the entire process has been extremely frustrating to Barrie Park neighborhood residents who just want to know how long it will be before they can put this situation behind them.

“We wish we had a definitive answer on when work on the park will get underway. Unfortunately, we do not. The length of the process is certainly not because of a lack of effort on the part of the Village and the Park District. The Village has a responsibility to ensure that the work proceeds not just as quickly as possible, but as safely as can be. Feedback from residents indicates that they, too, support safety over speed.”

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