

Community Update #6

December 2024

This month, under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency oversight, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, or NYCDEP, will begin the second phase of construction of the 8-million-gallon combined sewer overflow, or CSO, retention tank as part of the Gowanus Canal Superfund site cleanup.



8-million-gallon tank site during perimeter wall construction

Phase 2 Construction of CSO Retention Tank—Excavation

NYCDEP will remove soil from within the tank perimeter walls, which were constructed during the first phase of work at the site, down to approximately 60 feet.

NYCDEP expects about 60-65 truckloads of excavated material to be removed from the site each workday. The EPA is requiring NYCDEP to begin this next phase of work with expanded air monitoring, enhanced odor mitigation measures, and increased community notifications. Air sampling data is available on the NYCDEP's website at: www.nyc.gov/site/dep/water/gowanus-canal.page.

Along with the expanded air monitoring, the EPA's mobile laboratory bus, called the Trace Atmospheric Gas Analyzer, or TAGA, will be on-site at the beginning of the excavation work and will return periodically while work is ongoing. The TAGA bus, one of only two available in the country, measures low levels of contaminants in the air via instruments located on the bus. In addition, the EPA will use specific sensors that measure low levels of naphthalene in real-time. Should the EPA find the expanded mitigation efforts ineffective, it will direct NYCDEP to stop the soil excavation work until it can construct a tent that covers portions of the excavation.



Summa canisters used to collect air samples

Background

The EPA's cleanup plan for the Gowanus Canal consists of removing contaminated sediment from the bottom of the canal by dredging, capping the dredged areas, and stabilizing the mobile liquid coal tar in native sediment with a cement-like material. The plan also requires NYCDEP to build two retention tanks to prevent hazardous substances in CSOs from re-contaminating the canal after dredging.

The two CSO retention tanks consist of an eight-million-gallon tank, referred to as RH-034, at the head of the canal (Nevins Street between Butler Street and Sackett Street) and a four-million-gallon tank, referred to as OH-007, at the Owl's Head Peninsula (near 2nd Avenue and 6th Street).

Phase 1 Construction of CSO Retention Tank – Perimeter Wall

The first phase of the work to build the retention tanks, constructing the perimeter wall, was completed in July 2024. NYCDEP monitored the air during this work using eight monitoring stations around the perimeter of the site that continuously measured total volatile organic compounds, or TVOCs, and particulate matter concentrations during working hours. The monitors provided on-site construction staff with real time notifications

via text and email if TVOCs or particulate matter concentrations went above the limits that could be considered a risk to people's health.

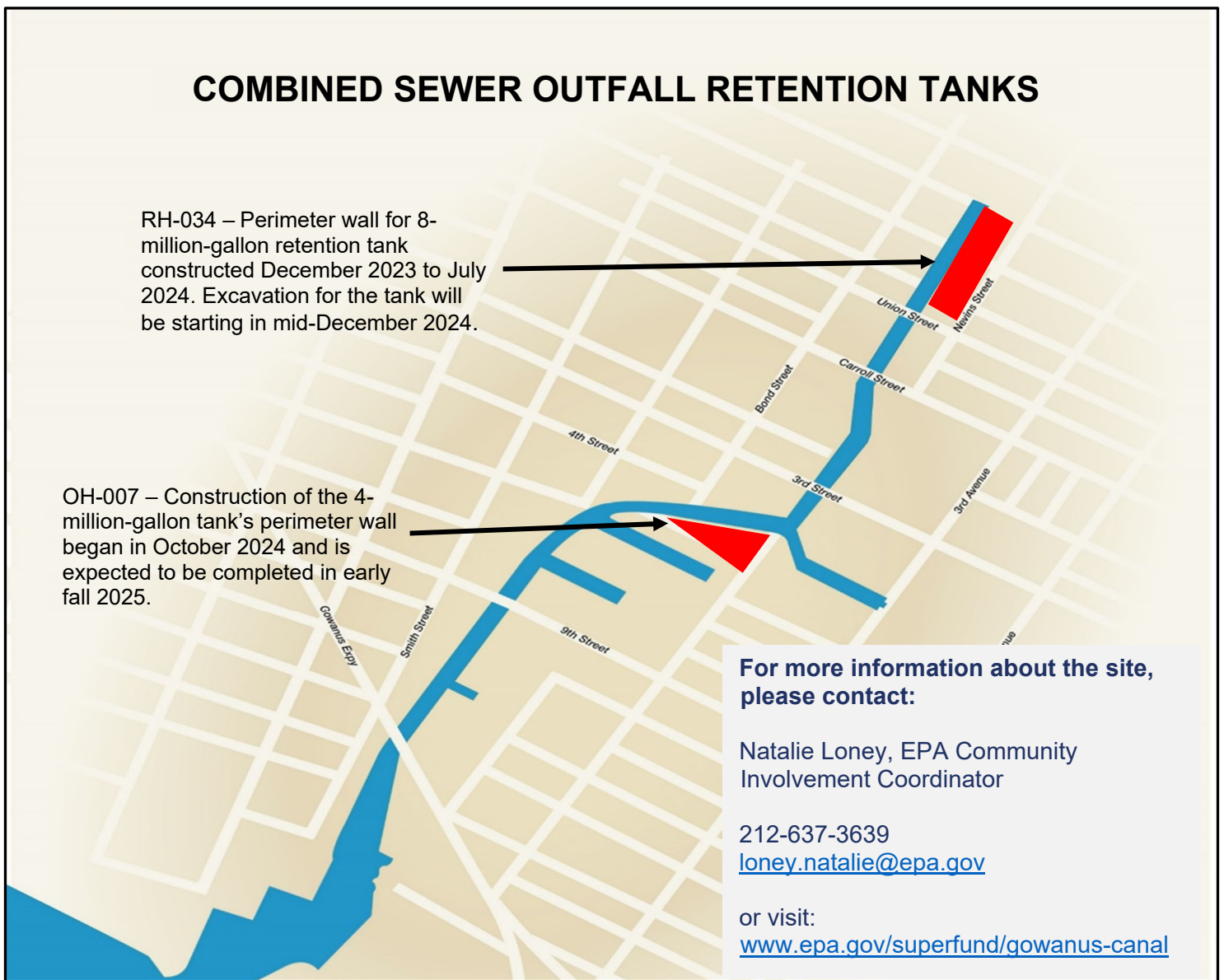
While the monitors showed no harmful levels of contamination, odors were reported by community members. NYCDEP took steps to lessen the odors and worked to improve those measures as work progressed. This included increasing the use of odor-suppressing foam on soil excavation areas, using odor-suppressing foam or tarps on soil stockpiles during times of inactive construction, and constructing a tent with a ventilation system and carbon treatment over equipment believed to be the primary source of the odors. NYCDEP, EPA, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation investigated odor complaints reported by impacted residents.

In February 2024, NYCDEP began collecting weekly air samples at the intersection of Sackett and Nevins Streets. NYCDEP continued this effort at additional locations in the neighborhood in June and July 2024. Air concentrations of naphthalene, a contaminant that creates odors and has the potential for health effects at low levels, were all below health-based levels of concern. These health-based levels were developed to be protective of the most sensitive members of the community, including children, pregnant women, the elderly and immunocompromised.

COMBINED SEWER OUTFALL RETENTION TANKS

RH-034 – Perimeter wall for 8-million-gallon retention tank constructed December 2023 to July 2024. Excavation for the tank will be starting in mid-December 2024.

OH-007 – Construction of the 4-million-gallon tank's perimeter wall began in October 2024 and is expected to be completed in early fall 2025.



For more information about the site, please contact:

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www.epa.gov/superfund/gowanus-canal