

Wednesday, 3 July 2019

Thebarton bore water ban proposed

The Environment Protection Authority has begun community consultation on a proposed groundwater prohibition area (GPA) in parts of Thebarton in Adelaide's west.

The GPA is bounded by South and Port roads to the west and east, and the River Torrens to the north, with the southern border beginning at Rose Street and ending at Livingstone Street.

EPA Director, Regulation, Peter Dolan, said the area's groundwater had been contaminated by a number of hazardous chemicals associated with manufacturing and industry, including chlorinated and petroleum hydrocarbons such as tetrachloroethene (PCE) and trichloroethene (TCE) and nitrates.

"The EPA has been undertaking environmental assessment work related to a former metal processing site on George Street, Thebarton, since 2017, and it is this contamination that has resulted in the move towards a GPA," Mr Dolan said.

"PCE and TCE can cause serious health problems – including cancer – if people come into contact with them over long periods of time. The bore water ban is designed to remove the major pathway for exposure.

"TCE and PCE remain in the environment for a long time and are notoriously difficult to remove from groundwater once an aquifer is contaminated. These chemicals could still be there in hundreds of years."

Mr Dolan said there were six other sources of contamination in the proposed GPA as well as the George Street metal works.

"Groundwater testing undertaken by a third party at one of the sites, 25 West Thebarton Road, also found heavy metals, including a small amount of uranium," he said.

"We are reassuring residents that radiation is not a cause for concern, as the uranium contains only low levels of naturally occurring radioactive material.

"You would actually be exposed to more radiation on a flight from Adelaide to Sydney than you would be anywhere on this site. On most of the property, the radiation levels are not distinguishable from the normal background levels you'd find in the rest of Adelaide.

"There would be a risk of metal poisoning, though, if anyone were to drink the contaminated groundwater, the same as if the water were contaminated with heavy metals like lead or mercury."

Between the 1950s and 2008, 25 West Thebarton Road was home to the Amdel Laboratory, which analysed rock and mineral samples from the Radium Hill and other uranium prospects around the state.

In the early 1950s, the waste from this testing was disposed of in a nearby pughole – one of the abandoned clay pits common in the inner west. Most of the contaminated material from the pughole was removed in the 1980s and '90s, and the pit was filled in and paved over. It is now a carpark.

Only residual amounts of uranium remain, and the groundwater contamination is localised to a single test site next to the pughole, with no evidence it has moved off the laboratory site.

Mr Dolan said the EPA had been in touch with all residents affected by the proposed GPA, and asked them not to use bore water for any purpose, including on lawns and gardens, or for filling swimming pools.

“Some homes that are just outside the actual contamination plume are still included in the GPA because if water is pumped there, it can spread the contamination further,” he said.

“Mains water is not affected by any of the contaminants, and it is safe to eat home-grown produce so long as it has not been irrigated with bore water.

“West End Brewing, including the West End community water fountain on Port Road, accesses the much deeper tertiary aquifer, so none of its wells are affected by this contamination.

“Western Adelaide has a long history of manufacturing and industry, but unfortunately it has left behind contamination like this from times when chemical handling and disposal did not meet the current stringent standards.”

GPA's already exist in several areas around the Adelaide metropolitan area, including Edwardstown, Allenby Gardens, and Glenelg East.

Community information drop-in sessions will be held later this month. For more information, visit www.engage.epa.sa.gov.au