

Soil has been collected for testing: An update on the former post office cleanup efforts

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ALTON – Soil samples have been collected from under the worksite where the former Alton Post Office stood on Belle Street by Ameren Illinois.

Ameren Illinois is working voluntarily with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) to conduct remediation on the site, which saw life as a manufactured gas facility before it became a post office. Founded in 1885, and closed in the first half of the 20th Century, the facility once provided cooking, heating and gaslight fuel to the people of Alton. Once it closed, however, it left behind pollutants related to coal tar deep beneath the ground.

While it poses little to no threat to the people of Alton, those pollutants are being cleaned by Ameren Illinois, who came to own the company once operating that facility over time. Ameren Illinois is working with IEPA to get those pollutants to safe levels or better.

The site was prepared for the remediation in February 2018, and construction began on the initial phase of in-situ thermal remediation (ISTR). ISTR heats the groundwater and soil beneath the site to high levels in an effort to cause such chemicals to boil. Those chemicals are then filtered through vapor and liquid.



Ameren Illinois Manager of Remediation Projects David Palmer said the soil beneath the site has been heated to full temperatures as of January 2019. After the current soil

samples are analyzed, the estimated completion time of the entire project will be updated.

Currently, the timing is on schedule, as Palmer said each portion of remediation is scheduled to take around eight months. Palmer said if the soil samples showed the need for further remediation, however, the project could continue upwards of another year.

“If the results are good, we'll install the new system and begin remediation on the rest of the site,” Palmer said Thursday. “On the surface, it appears like an empty lot, but below it, we're working on getting concentrations to a safe level or better.”

The Alton site is one of 55 such sites across the Ameren Illinois coverage area currently being cleaned by the company in conjunction with the IEPA's environmental cleanup program. Other similar companies to Ameren Illinois operate other such legacy sites, but Palmer could not comment on the status of those.

Once the site has been successfully remediated by IEPA standards, its future use will be in the hands of the city. It is currently zoned as “commercial” and could be safe to use in just over a year, assuming the Ameren Illinois remediation continues on schedule.