

What else could pollute Charleston's water?

February 24, 2014 by Ken Ward Jr.



Photo by Commercial Photography Services of West Virginia, via U.S. Chemical Safety Board

Since the Jan. 9 chemical spill, lots of West Virginians have been asking some pretty good questions about the vulnerability of our drinking water supplies: Why are facilities like Freedom Industries allowed to be located immediately upstream from drinking water intakes? What other similar sites present risks of contamination? What can be done to minimize or eliminate these risks?

A new report out this morning from the consulting firm [Downstream Strategies](#) tries to start digging into these sorts of questions. The report is called Potential Significant Contaminant Sources above West Virginia American Water's Charleston Intake: A Preliminary Assessment and is online [here](#).

Among other things, the report identifies 61 potential significant contaminant sources, or PSCSs, which is nearly a dozen more than were counted in [a decade-old report](#) on the Elk River water supply from the state Department of Health and Human Resources. Downstream Strategies explains in its report:

The largest numbers of PSCSs are identified as car dealerships (10 sites), gas stations (7 sites), permitted discharge pipes (5 sites), repair shops (4 sites), and auto repair shops (4 sites).

Notable PSCSs identified by WVBPH include the Freedom Industries site, a school bus parking and refueling facility with an aboveground storage tank, and a concrete facility with three readily visible aboveground storage tanks.

Downstream Strategies goes on to explain:

Additional research has identified other potential sites of interest within the ZCC that deserve additional scrutiny: an industrial park just downstream from the Freedom site and clusters of commercial and industrial buildings on both sides of the Elk River near the intake.

A water resources permit query identified 15 NPDES permits, two underground injection control permits, and one “no exposure” permit within the ZCC. These permits did not correlate well with the PSCSs identified by WVBPH.

The NPDES permits included three individual and 12 general permits, in addition to the general permits issued for home aeration units and construction sites that were omitted from the analysis. If the Legislature were to require individual NPDES permits within ZCCs, this new requirement would apply to these 12 identified general permits as well as to the home aeration units and construction sites omitted from this analysis.

Three facilities outside of the ZCC were identified for additional investigation. These sites include Yeager Airport, which is located immediately adjacent to the ZCC; what appears to be a propane facility located less than one mile upstream from the ZCC; and a compressor station and extraction plant located just upstream from Clendenin.

The report also says:

While this report focuses on the PSCSs and water resources permits above WVAW’s Elk River intake, the circumstances that led to contamination of the Elk River are examples of what could happen to many communities if they do not engage in proper planning and if regulatory agencies do not provide proper oversight. In some cases, tighter regulations are also warranted. Populations in Morgantown, Huntington, and cities and towns across the state are at risk if PSCSs are not accurately identified, and if risks from these sites are not managed.

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