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# Raleigh County has one-fourth of state's aboveground tanks holding MCHM



Story

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Posted: Thursday, January 15, 2015 5:20 pm

By Daniel Tyson REGISTER-HERALD REPORTER

A quarter of the state's 16 aboveground storage tanks containing the chemical mixture MCHM are located within Raleigh County's borders, a report released Thursday by Downstream Strategies and West Virginia River Coalition found.

MCHM was one of the chemicals leaked from the Freedom Industry tanks along the Elk River in Kanawha County last year, leaving 300,000 residents in nine counties without drinking water for several days.

The four MCHM tanks are located on coal companies' properties in Whitesville, Naoma, Rhodell and Sophia, according to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.

The report, "Aboveground Storage Tanks in West Virginia: A Snapshot," did not state how much MCHM is in the tanks located in Raleigh County, but of the 16, nine have capacities above 10,000 gallons, five had between 5,000 to 10,000 gallons, and two have less than 5,000 gallons, the report states.

The report also found that six of the 16 tanks storing MCHM are inside protected areas. Those protected areas are divided into two distinct categories, but both are aimed at protecting drinking water. The Zone of Critical Concern, or ZCC, is land adjacent to streams that are close to surface water drinking water intakes, while Source Water Protection Areas, or SWPA, designates land above groundwater drinking water sources.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website states MCHM is used to separate usable coal from rock, debris and dust and is a clear liquid that smells like licorice. However, despite MCHM causing nausea, headaches and vomiting, it has not been officially designated by the federal government as a toxic and hazardous substance, the report states.

The report did not focus exclusively on MCHM tanks. Rather, it looked at 47,000 tanks registered with the West Virginia DEP, since last year's landmark legislation requiring all aboveground tanks to be registered with the department. Of those registered, 3,244 were water tanks, while the vast majority held toxic material, including by-products from coal mining, oil and natural gas, wastewater and products from utilities and chemical and industrial facilities, according to the report.

Statewide, Raleigh County ranks no. 17 for aboveground storage tanks. It has more than 850 aboveground tanks, nearly 100 inside the protected zones. Statewide, Wyoming County ranks no. 8, with 1,528 tanks. Nearly 80 are inside protected zones. Fayette County has 455 aboveground tanks, with 32 inside ZCC and SWPA areas. Of the 381 tanks in Nicholas County, only five are in the protected zones. In Greenbrier County, none of the 136 tanks are in protected zones. Monroe County has 34 tanks and none are in ZCC or SWPA areas. Summers only has one tank in the protected areas, but 30 aboveground tanks in all, the report found.

Doddridge, Ritchie, Harrison, Lewis and Kanawha counties lead the state in aboveground tanks, according to the report.



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Approximately 75 percent of the registered tanks are associated with the oil and gas industry. While only 4 percent of the oil and gas tanks are within the protected zones, an additional 40 percent are within 1,000 feet of surface water, the report states.

More than 1,100 tanks failed their initial inspection and only 55 percent of registered tanks have been certified as fit for service.

"It's remarkable to see the number of tanks so close to rivers and streams," said Angie Rosser, executive director of the West Virginia Rivers Coalition.

Evan Hansen, president of Downstream Strategies, said after the Elk River spill the state's action to pass bipartisan legislation and the DEP's new rules and regulations concerning aboveground tanks was welcomed.

But now as a new legislative session starts and lawmakers consider adopting new aboveground storage tank rules, many question whether the state's commitment to clean drinking water remains as strong as it was a year ago.

"The politics of clean water is hard to guess," Hansen said.



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