

Statement of Thomas Duch  
City Manager, Garfield, NJ  
May 17, 2013

I appear before you today on behalf of the people of the City of Garfield, a community of approximately 31,000 people, located in southern Bergen County, in the State of New Jersey. We are a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious community. We are a microcosm of America itself.

Our City is an old industrial City filled with tired factory buildings, many of which are beyond their useful life. Many of these former industrial sites have contamination problems which are beyond the grasp of local government to handle.

Back in 1983, at the EC Electroplating Factory located in our community, there was a spill of hexavalent chromium. Approximately 3,640 gallons of chromium were released into the earth. 1,056 gallons were recovered with the rest remaining in our soil. Over the last 25 years the NJ DEP handled this site. They made a determination in the late 1980's that no further action was required and that there were no health concerns.

In early 1993, Fire Company #3 located in the downstream plume of the underground water table had to be closed due to the detection of hexavalent chromium in the basement of that firehouse facility. As we have learned, once hexavalent chromium enters a building and crystalizes, it can be dispersed into the air. Scientific evidence tells us that, if you breathe that dust into your lungs, it will likely cause cancer.

Approximately five years ago (in the fall of 2008) I was contacted by the US EPA. I was told that they were taking on the responsibility for the chromium spill in our City. My initial meeting was productive and I was impressed with the competence and genuine interest of the EPA in helping our people. We provided them with lists of residents, property owners and tenants in an effort to get notice out to the community that the USEPA would investigate and examine homes and properties in the affected area.

The EC Electroplating facility is located in a densely populated section of Garfield. Within the spill area, there are approximately 600 separate parcels of property. These include one and two family homes, multi-family dwellings, an elementary school, a daycare facility, houses of worship, and industrial and commercial properties. We have approximately 6,300 separate parcels of property in our City. Therefore, almost 10% of our community has been affected. Notification has been made to residents in multiple languages: English, Spanish, Polish and Macedonian. We have conducted many public hearings with the EPA to provide information to our people and to answer their questions. The EPA's team on the ground in the City of Garfield has been exceptional. They have answered our concerns professionally, knowledgeably and competently. They have given reassurance to a scared populace. Despite that reassurance, property values in the area have declined significantly.

With the assistance of the EPA, 400 homes and properties have been examined. Contaminated properties, detected to date, have been cleaned up and monitoring wells have been installed throughout the affected areas (between 8 feet and 400 feet deep) in order to fingerprint exactly where the contamination lies below the surface.

To get into the ground below the EC Electroplating factory, demolition of the building on the surface was required. Due to safety concerns from residents that chromium tainted dust could be released from the property during demolition, an additional public hearing was held with the staff and administration of a K – 5 elementary school one-half block from the site, which included residents throughout the affected area. The factory itself has now been demolished. The site is fenced and ready for the next phase of study to plan for the removal of the chromium that sits below ground in the water table of this neighborhood. This phase, the analysis and clean-up phase, will absolutely require continued funding of the USEPA initiative in the City of Garfield. We are a Superfund site. We are a superfund clean-up priority. We are a community living in fear that this chromium in our water table may be impacting the health, safety and welfare of our residents.

Our clean-up need is immediate. I urge your committee to continue with the necessary funding to address Superfund sites, not only in the City of Garfield but throughout the nation. It is incumbent upon all of us, as public officials, to prioritize and to fund those budgetary requests that provide the greatest good for the people we answer to.

I respectfully request your support for all of the clean-up funding that is necessary in the City of Garfield and other sites which present immediate health hazards to the people who live in or near them.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before this prestigious committee.