

# Love Canal-Type Landfill Submerged In New Orleans Flood

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Overlooked in many news reports about the unfolding storm disaster in the southern United States, especially in the City of New Orleans, in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, is a potentially dramatic pollution issue related to a toxic landfill that sits under the flood waters right in the city's downtown, according to map overlays of the flooded area. The situation could exacerbate the already dire threat to human health and the environment from the flood waters.

The Agriculture Street Landfill (ASL) is situated on a 95-acre site in New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana. The ASL is a federally registered Superfund site, and is on the National Priorities List of highly contaminated sites requiring cleanup and containment. A few years ago the site, which sits underneath and beside houses and a school, was fenced and covered with clean soil. However, three feet or more of flood waters could potentially cause the landfill's toxic contents - the result of decades of municipal and industrial waste dumping - to leach out.

Houses and buildings that were constructed in later years directly atop parts of the landfill. Residents report unusual cancers and health problems and have lobbied for years to be relocated away from the old contaminated site, which contains not only municipal garbage, but buried industrial wastes such as what would be produced by service stations and dry cleaners, manufacturers or burning. The site was routinely sprayed with DDT in the 1940s and 50s and, in 1962, 300,000 cubic yards of excess fill were removed from ASL because of ongoing subsurface fires. (The site was nicknamed "Dante's Inferno" because of the fires.)

The ASL can be thought of a sort of Love Canal for New Orleans -- and now it sits under water.

The ASL site is three miles south of Lake Pontchartrain and about 2.5 north-northeast of the city's central business district (roughly halfway between the old French Quarter and the shore of Lake Pontchartrain).

Disturbingly, the site is also very close to the Industrial Canal Levee, a section of which collapsed and allowed flood waters to pour in, almost directly in the direction of the ASL site.

Government reports describe ASL as being "bounded on the north by Higgins Boulevard and south and west by Southern Railroads right-of-ways. The eastern boundary of the landfill extends from the cul-de-sac at the southern end of Clouet Street, near the railroad tracks to Higgins Boulevard between Press and Montegut Streets."

Locate that site on a map (see websites below), and then overlay published maps of New Orleans flooding, and one finds the old toxic landfill is situated right in the middle of a huge area of three-foot flooding. That industrial area is almost continuously connected with water to the downtown and northern areas of the city. It's not outlandish to consider the possibility that toxic waste

from the landfill may mix with floodwaters and spread far beyond the old landfill site.

Although the humanitarian rescue operation must take precedence at the current time, authorities and the public must not overlook this pollution situation, which in both the near and long-term may be dangerous to human health and the environment. We must hope that emergency responders will investigate this site as soon as possible and take steps to mitigate potential off-site migration of hazardous materials. It may be that sandbag walls are required here, as well as on the broken levees.

This magazine will update the situation as more information becomes available.

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