

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

EDUARDO ROVIRA, JR.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND ACTION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH
IN AMBLER (REACH Ambler)

Transcript of an Interview
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

BoRit Superfund Site
Ambler, Pennsylvania

on

12 March 2014

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

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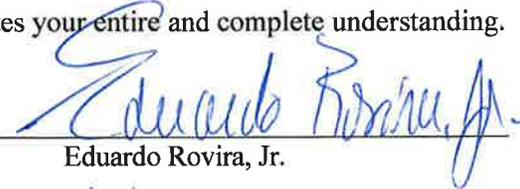
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ABSTRACT

Eduardo Rovira received a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Puerto Rico. Shortly after college he began working for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He spent six years as an oil inspector and then became an on-scene coordinator (OSC) in the five-state region that includes Pennsylvania. When he was called in to perform the initial assessment of the BoRit Asbestos Site, he recommended more sampling of air and water especially. Although a full year of testing found that asbestos risk was too low to require intervention, the EPA decided to list the site on the Superfund National Priorities List anyway. Their justification was that there were both visible and hidden asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) that could potentially be made hazardous by people or weather.

Rovira describes the different processes involved in remediating Wissahickon Creek, Rose Valley Creek, and Tannery Run Creek. Though they have most elements in common, there were some variations of treatment. Wissahickon Creek's channel was widened and its banks were stabilized by clearcutting vegetation, including all trees. Then the area was leveled and covered with geocells, then topsoil, hydroseeding, riprap, and straw mats to prevent erosion. When Rose Valley's cable concrete mats (CCMs) were destroyed by a tropical storm the EPA replaced the original CCMs with stronger, better-anchored CCMs with riprap. Tannery Run had to be partially routed through an eight-foot pipe to preserve a collapsing parking lot, and the Run also required CCMs. Remediation away from the creeks did not require these more extreme measures; the area was clearcut and then covered with geo-fabric, topsoil, straw mats, and vegetation. The EPA is now dredging the reservoir to test the ground underneath; the water will be treated and discharged to the Wissahickon Creek. When this process is complete, water will be pumped back into the pond and vegetation will be replanted, in the hope of inducing birds to return.

Rovira explains his communication with the citizens of the area; he says he sends a weekly email update, and he is available for questions at any time. Even invasive activities have not produced hazardous levels of asbestos, and people's fears have decreased with the years of cleanup. Rovira thinks that capping is the safest and ultimately the cheapest method of remediation. He points out that the Ambler piles were hilly and did not lend themselves to development, but the BoRit site is flat and will be suitable for whatever purpose the citizens choose, probably a park; he believes this remediation will be completed in about a year and a half. Ambler's experience should, in his opinion, remind other communities to be involved early, to have good leaders, and to try to understand the issues involved.

INTERVIEWER

Lee Sullivan Berry earned a master's degree in medieval studies from the University of Notre Dame, and a bachelor of arts degree in religious studies from the University of Pennsylvania. As a staff member in the Center for Oral History, Berry conducts background research and oral-history interviews, edits transcripts of completed interviews, and coordinates with interviewers and interviewees to finalize transcripts. She was the lead interviewer for the REACH Ambler project and has presented her work at meetings of the American Society for Environmental History and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

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| <p>Chemical engineering degree from University of Puerto Rico. Six years as oil inspector; ten years as on-scene coordinator (OSC). Oil inspection meant removal; called in for emergencies. Worked in five-state region. Also removal of anthrax, hurricane detritus, oil spills, etc.</p> | |
| Beginning at BoRit Asbestos Area | 4 |
| <p>Site badly overgrown; had to clearcut. Mixed residential and old empty area from former industry. Recommended more air and water-quality sampling; then sediment and soil testing. Full year of testing found levels of asbestos not hazardous. Asbestos-containing material (ACM) visible but not friable; possibility of human or divine intervention, so remediation unit decided to list on Superfund National Priorities List anyway.</p> | |
| Remediation Procedures | 7 |
| <p>Stabilized banks of Wissahickon Creek by clearcutting vegetation, including all trees. Leveled area, covered with geocells, then topsoil, hydroseeding, riprap, straw mats to prevent erosion. Vegetation doing very well. Layers of junk underneath all covered with at least two feet of topsoil. Rose Valley Creek treated similarly, but remediation ruined by tropical storm; channel widened, and heavier, more strongly-anchored CCMs and riprap added. Tannery Run Creek required CCMs. Hybrid method used; some open stream, some water trained through eight-foot pipe. Reservoir being pumped out to determine what is underneath; water being treated and discharged into the Wissahickon Creek. Remediation different for land away from water: clearcut; geo-fabric; soil; straw mats; vegetation. Slope of pile reduced a bit. When finished will plant trees; hopes birds will come back.</p> | |
| General Observations | 17 |
| <p>Communications with citizens, community advisory group (CAG), Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, municipalities. Weekly email updates mostly successful; daily accessibility. Nearly one thousand air samples, no hazardous levels, even in invasive activities. Thinks capping safest remediation method. Recreational park would be good use for completed site. Ambler piles mountains and hills, not suitable for much development. BoRit flat, easier to fix. People's fears lessened by years of cleanup. Lessons from Ambler's experience: get involved early, keep open mind, try to understand procedures. Leaders needed. Thinks another year and a half to completion, but will look very good and be good for community.</p> | |
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