

Peppersauce Bottoms Community

Pueblo, Colorado

In the summer of 2006, the Peppersauce Bottoms neighborhood in Pueblo was ravaged by a flood. Flood waters passed over an adjacent railroad service yard which stored creosote-treated railroad ties and handled various petroleum products. Basements and ground floors were flooded. Furnaces and other equipment were ruined. Floors and walls soon developed mold. The local community responded by contributing money, materials and time to assist in repairing the damage.

In addition to repairing the damage caused by the flood, the community was very concerned that their land and homes may have been contaminated by materials from the rail service yard.



The Flood

The flood first brought the EJ program into contact with the community. In a tour of the neighborhood, we learned that if it were not proven that the properties which had been flooded were not proven to be safe that several neighbors (most of which had lived in the “Barrio” for all of their lives) would choose to move. This was a difficult decision and one not easily arrived at. All residents would have preferred to remain in their homes. In January of 2007, the EJ Team met with Region 8 Emergency Response team and explained the circumstance. The Emergency Response managers determined that an assessment of the properties was possible and appropriate. The results of that assessment demonstrated that the flood had not deposited hazardous materials in the community.

Creosote



Subsequently, residents called EPA regarding the potential health hazards posed by the proximity of the neighborhood to the nearby commercial operation. This operation used creosote-treated railroad ties to create emergency track sections. The fumes from this facility permeated the neighborhood. The community residents had complained to the company, but no significant changes in practices were made. The Pueblo City/County Health Department was called several times to determine whether the local odor ordinance was being violated. The Health Department could not make that determination.

A fire at the facility in August of 2007 dramatically increased community concern about potential hazards. It was fortunate that the wind was relatively still and blowing away from the nearby residences. The fire also had the effect of heightening community-wide awareness of the potential for significant damage both the health of the residents and the nearby environment. Additionally, the fire gave the company a better look at what can happen when you locate such a facility close by a community. Today, the company no longer operates at this location.

Stormwater

The EPA EJ and Brownfields Teams then worked with the community, the City of Pueblo and the local EPA CARE Grantee (PuebloCAREs) to address the problem of persistent flooding in the community. By assessing nearby sites through the EPA Brownfields Program we determined that contamination of the land was minimal. The City then negotiated the purchase of twelve properties to aid with the interception of storm water and to mitigate the frequent flooding which affects Peppersauce.

Currently these properties are being converted to greenspace/catchment areas to create a neighborhood significantly less prone to flooding



All of the work described above demonstrates the power of partnerships and collaborative decision-making in advancing a community's interests. Together, we were able to assist one of the smallest and poorest communities in Pueblo to create a healthier environment for current and future residents.

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