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Benzene found near underground storage tank

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FRANKLIN — When acetone and toluene were found seeping from bedrock near the Harpeth River, Egyptian Lacquer, the paint maker on the hill above the area, was an easy suspect.

But when benzene, a carcinogen associated with gasoline, was found in varying amounts in some of the seeps and in the first monitoring well dug in the neighborhood above the chemical flow, the source was a mystery.

Egyptian Lacquer, which opened in Franklin in 1978, says it does not use benzene in its coatings and numerous kinds of paints.

"The source of the benzene is unknown," wrote Dwight Hinch, the company's environmental consultant, in an August 2007 letter. "(Egyptian Lacquer) reportedly has specifically avoided use of benzene, a chemical that has been known as a human carcinogen for many years."

However, an October 2006 soil sample at Egyptian Lacquer turned up traces of benzene as well as other "volatile organic compounds" on the company's property, though all were below permitted industrial and residential levels, according to a report by August Mack Environmental.

The benzene was found near where the company has a 6,500-gallon underground storage tank that was used by a previous site owner for petroleum. The tank has been used since 1988 as "a cooling water reservoir" for the company, state records show.

Egyptian Lacquer's attorney, Bill Penny, said that it's not likely the existing underground tank is a source of benzene because he said tests don't show other chemicals associated with gasoline production being present.

"We're going to act as if it were from our release, rather than argue about it," Penny said.

State wants second opinion on work

State officials have asked for a peer review of the cleanup by science and engineering company SAIC, Inc., while the company's consultant, TriAD Environmental Consultants, has enlisted a different lab for the testing of the chemical samples.

Tests also are being sent to the state Department of Health Environmental Laboratories in Nashville.

Penny said the new lab will use lower detection limits, which would verify the presence of other chemicals in the samples. "We just wanted to verify whether or not other constituents were a problem," he said.

Penny also asked TDEC for details of the peer review, which Egyptian Lacquer will have to pay for. "We are not willing to give SAIC a blank check," Penny wrote in an e-mail to TDEC officials Aug. 14. "It is imperative that we see a scope of work, a work plan and a budget."

Penny also brought up the possibility of rerouting part of Liberty Creek to better aerate the water and eliminate toluene. He asked for advance notice that the rerouting, part of the revised

cleanup plan, would be approved.

"We at least need to have some sense that the corrective action step will be approved (by TDEC)," he wrote.
