Statement of

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before

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

on

WATER RESOURCES CONTAMINATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

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Chairman Johnson and distinguished members of the sub-committee, thank you for inviting me to participate today in discussions on the impacts of Superfund sites and groundwater contamination in the Hudson Valley, and specifically the Department of Health's role in the investigation and clean up of Superfund sites. The potential health impacts from these sites and what is being done to protect the public, particularly with regard to Hopewell Precision, will be addressed.

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) participates as a partner with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) in investigating, evaluating and responding to reported instances of toxic chemicals in the environment and particularly with inactive (Superfund) hazardous waste sites and active Resource Conservation and Recovery Act facilities (RCRA).

The Department's role is to assure that appropriate data are collected to evaluate existing or potential human exposures. The Department considers the toxicity of chemicals, the nature of the exposures and, as necessary, executes epidemiologic studies to identify adverse health outcomes. Further, outreach and education materials are developed for the community and physicians. This is done to identify, eliminate or reduce such exposures and recommend subsequent actions.

Over the nearly 30 years that the NYSDOH has been addressing health issues with hazardous waste programs, many lessons have been learned. During this period, there have been great improvements in the investigatory tools, analytical methodologies and an enhanced understanding of how chemicals behave in the environment leading to an improved ability to evaluate potentially environmentally induced disease. Communication has been greatly improved between the Department and the affected communities.

During the evaluation of potential health impacts, particularly at federal superfund sites such as Hopewell Precision, the DOH partners with ATSDR to develop Public Health Assessments (PHA). A PHA is an evaluation that is conducted to determine whether and to what extent people have been exposed to hazardous substances from a site. If the assessment indicates that there have been exposures, the associated risks and possible health effects, particularly for children are then examined. Community concerns are considered and what follow-up actions are necessary to remove or reduce the exposures are established. This evaluation results in a public health action plan that offers measures to protect the community. As part of my testimony, a copy of our recently completed PHA for the Hopewell Precision Area Contamination is attached and can be accessed on the department's website at:

(http://www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/investigations/hopewell/docs/public_health_assessment.pdf)

The PHA made several recommendations that were directed at reducing exposures to contaminated drinking water and contaminated soil vapors. This will be done by fully defining the area of contamination with the state or federal government providing and

maintaining the appropriate treatment systems to mitigate exposures. In the area surrounding Hopewell Precision, EPA has sampled over 450 private water supplies. DEC and EPA have provided individual treatment systems for approximately 53 wells that exceeded state and federal drinking water standards. In addition, over 200 homes were tested for soil vapor intrusion resulting in the installation of 53 home remedial systems.

As part of the PHA Public Health Action Plan, the department continues to work with the community of Hopewell Junction by including them in the New York State Volatile Organic (VOC) Chemical Exposure Registry.

The VOC Exposure Registry was established in 1999 as a tool for health status assessment and long-term follow-up for communities and individuals with documented exposures to VOCs. The Registry is currently evaluating exposures and the health status of New York State residents at locations where drinking water or indoor air was contaminated with VOCs from landfills, industrial sites, spills or other sources. People who are enrolled in the Registry are kept informed of the research results that come from that data.

For the Hopewell Precision and Shenandoah Road sites, sampling information was used to identify impacted households. Questionnaires requesting information concerning exposures and health outcomes were distributed to 75 Shenandoah Road households in 2000. In 2003, contact was made with 47 Hopewell Precision households who had private well water contamination and, in 2006, 192 households who may have been

affected by soil vapor intrusion. There was a 61% response rate at Shenandoah Road and 26% in the Hopewell Precision community. Because many people did not respond to the survey, the information from this effort is, of course, incomplete. This information collected was used to identify any obvious or unusual health problems/patterns. Nothing atypical emerged from this data, but because the response rates were so low, the results were not meaningful.

The next step now underway addresses the response rate problem by using existing health outcome data from New York State Vital Records (Birth Certificates), the NYS Congenital Malformations Registry and NYS Cancer Registry. Data are being analyzed to evaluate possible adverse birth outcomes, some of which are low birth weight, congenital malformations and cancer for both Shenandoah Road and Hopewell Precision and other sites with similar exposures in New York State. (This review includes total congenital malformations - birth defects - and the prevalence of specific malformations that have been associated with VOC exposure. These include neural tube defects, oro-facial clefts and cardiac malformations)

These data will be used to compare levels of adverse health outcomes in impacted areas to the levels in the rest of New York State, excluding New York City. This type of review, sometimes called a health statistics review, cannot link causes and effects but can suggest relationships that merit additional research. It is anticipated that the birth outcome portion of this evaluation will be completed in approximately one year, spring 2009. The cancer portion is expected to be done six months later.

The Department staff worked with Hopewell Precision area residents as the boundary area for the evaluation was defined. The communities will continue to be engaged as the project moves forward. Once completed, the report that summarizes the findings at the specific sites will be shared with residents and other stakeholders. For small areas like these, reviews that combine sites with similar exposures will be undertaken. Because of the high level of interest in specific communities, results will be shared, but without compromising confidential health information.

In summary, in collaboration with ATSDR, the Department developed a comprehensive evaluation of environmental contamination around hazardous waste sites to identify exposures. The DoH worked together with ATSDR, EPA and DEC to identify appropriate actions to mitigate the exposures. During the process, the Department worked with the community, heard their concerns and as necessary, developed and carried out health studies.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this very important issue. I will be happy to answer any questions.

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