

# Fact Sheet

## Fort Wayne Former Manufactured Gas Plant Site

Northern Indiana Public Service  
Company (NIPSCO)  
Merrillville, Indiana

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### Introduction

Beginning early in the 1800s, America was fueled largely by coal. One of the uses of coal was to manufacture “town gas,” which made our streets, homes, and businesses cleaner and safer places to be. The manufactured gas era ended in the mid-1950s when natural gas became widely available through the interstate pipeline system. This now outdated energy source has become an environmental challenge for today.



As part of its commitment to protect the environment, provide a safe work place, and be a good neighbor in our communities, NIPSCO has a program to study and remediate sites where gas was produced to learn if they might have impacted the environment. Between 1851 and about 1948, a former gas plant operated along the south bank of the St. Mary’s River on both sides of Superior Street and east of Barr Street. Restaurants and a government office are now at this location.

### What is a manufactured gas plant?

A manufactured gas plant produced “town gas” by roasting coal, coke, and/or oil in a closed vessel. The gas was captured and cleaned of impurities before being stored in large cylindrical structures, known as gas holders. Town gas was distributed first for lighting streets, homes, and businesses, and then for heating and cooking. These gas holders are prominent features in historical pictures of our communities.

### Why is NIPSCO addressing gas plant sites now?

Though these plants are believed to have been operated in keeping with the standards and practices of their times, today we know more about potential impacts to the environment. We have investigated soil and groundwater conditions at this former manufactured gas plant location and are taking actions to manage impacts to the environment.

### Are government agencies involved with the project?

We are conducting our project in cooperation with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s Voluntary Remediation Program. IDEM is overseeing the project to ensure that the remedy achieves a satisfactory level of human health and environmental protection.

### How can manufactured gas plants impact the environment?

As with many industrial processes, gas manufacturing produced byproducts and residues. Coal tar is the primary gas manufacturing byproduct associated with these sites. When the manufactured gas plants were operating, the coal tar was generally sold for use in roofing and as road tar. When these plants closed down, the tar was often left on the property in underground structures. Over the years, the tar and other residues may have impacted soil and water.

### Are gas manufacturing byproducts considered a risk to health and the environment?

Coal tar contains some chemical compounds that are considered hazardous. It is used safely today in consumer products, such as dandruff shampoos and driveway sealers, but too much contact with impacted soil or water could pose a risk.

Some of the chemical compounds in coal tar are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs. These chemicals are widespread in the environment because they are produced in combustion processes, such as burning coal in a boiler, wood in a fireplace, or gasoline in an automobile. Coming in contact with PAHs can result in minor irritation to the skin or nose and throat. In cases of prolonged exposure, there could be an increased risk of cancer.

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are typically found in soil and groundwater samples at former manufactured gas plant locations. These chemicals evaporate easily in the open air but may remain



underground for a long time. Benzene, toluene, ethyl benzene, and xylenes have been detected in the groundwater below the Fort Wayne property. They are widely used in industry and are components of many consumer products, such as unleaded gasoline. Benzene has been linked with leukemia among workers directly exposed to it, and the other chemicals are known to cause health problems after prolonged exposure.

### Are there risks from the Fort Wayne former town gas plant site?

The site investigations found that, while risks to public health from the former industrial operations are low, there are environmental impacts that need to be addressed. Some coal tar remains below ground and in river sediment where people are not coming in contact with it. Although groundwater beneath the site has been impacted, it is not being used and Fort Wayne's drinking water is not affected.

### How is NIPSCO addressing the environmental impacts?

Beginning in January 2009, we plan to address impacts to the 305 Superior Street property and a small strip of land in the adjacent park.

The goal of the 2009 project is to restore the environment at the former industrial site so that it continues to be safe to use over the long term. A major objective is to halt impacts to the St. Mary's River. We are working closely with IDEM to ensure that when the project is completed, the site meets applicable standards that protect the environment.

### How will the remediation project be conducted?

The work plan involves excavation of impacted soil from the base of an underground gas storage structure near a building and stabilization of other tarry subsurface soil with a cement-based material. In

addition, coal tar collection wells will be installed along the riverbank. The groundwater will be monitored for many years after the work is completed.

### How will the project affect the neighborhood?

A portion of Barr Street north of Superior Street will be closed during the project; however access to Club Soda, Headwaters Park and the city parking lot will continue to be available from both Barr and Clinton streets. The restaurants at 305 Superior Street will be closed during a portion of the work.

NIPSCO's environmental remediation projects are carried out under health and safety plans that are designed to protect workers and ensure there are no adverse off-site impacts. The property will be secured by fencing, and the gates will be locked when the workers are not present.

We expect the work may produce noticeable odors at some times. Coal tar smells very similar to mothballs or roofing tar. Workers will be able to reduce the odors with foam and tarps. In addition, the air will be monitored for dust and chemical emissions, using equipment that works much like smoke detectors do to alert workers before emissions could reach unsafe levels.

### When will the former gas plant site project be completed?

The majority of the 2009 remedial work will conclude by May 1, although parking lot paving and landscaping may take a few weeks longer.

Remaining work includes managing impacts to the river. In November 2008, absorptive clay mats were installed on the river bottom alongside the site as a pilot project for this phase of the overall project. It is possible there will be additional soil and groundwater sampling at the site in the months to come.



### Where can I get more information?

NIPSCO wants to keep you informed about our environmental project at this former manufactured gas plant site. For questions or further information, you may visit our website at [www.fortwaynegasplant.com](http://www.fortwaynegasplant.com) or you may contact:

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The Allen County Public Library at 900 Library Plaza has an information repository of the former gas plant site project documents in the Business and Technology Department.