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Avtex Superfund Site Returned to Community As Marketing & Redevelopment Initiative Begins

September 16, 2014, Front Royal, Virginia: On September 20, 2014, one of Virginia's largest Superfund Sites will be returned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to the Economic Development Authority. After twenty-five years, the site that once housed the American Viscose Corporation and Avtex Fibers; that was added to the National Priorities List for Superfund Sites in 1986; and that was abruptly shut down in 1989 will be returned to its community in Front Royal, Virginia. The Economic Development Authority now prepares its marketing and redevelopment initiative.

Beginning in 1940, American Viscose, and later Avtex Fibers, manufactured rayon, polypropylene and polyester for use in garments, parachute cording, aircraft tires and eventually missile nose cones. At its peak, the plant employed 3,000 people from the Northern Shenandoah Valley and became one of the region's premiere employers.

The site encompassed 500 acres of land situated in the middle of the Town of Front Royal, along the Shenandoah River, at the base of the Shenandoah National Park.

The wastes from the process included viscose, sulfate sludge and fly ash. In 1986 the site was listed on the federal National Priorities List of Superfund Sites. And, in 1989 the site was shut down due to environmental infractions. The impact was devastating to the remaining 500 local employees, the local economy and the community as a whole.

Between 1989 and 1998, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency performed emergency actions, site-wide remedial investigation, and removed high-impact buildings from the site.

The groundwork for site remediation, ownership and conservation easements was laid out by the courts and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In 1998, FMC Corporation took over remediation of the site and in 2000 the Front Royal-Warren County Economic Development Authority took title of the property.

The Superfund clean-up process began and included: demolition and decontamination of buildings; sewer plugging and removal; sulfate/fly ash basin closures; old landfill improvements; viscose basin remediation; soil and groundwater remediation; wastewater treatment plant operations.

At the persistence of two local citizens, Bill Barnett and Fred Foster, and with the help of Senators John Warner and Chuck Robb and Congressman Frank Wolf, and the Environmental Protection Agency, federal money was allocated to continue the clean-up and remediation activities. A Master Plan was designed and stakeholders' meetings were conducted between 1999 and 2001. The Community was invited in to participate in the visioning process for the future of the site.

A redevelopment plan was designed and approved by the Town of Front Royal and Warren County leadership and included commercial/industrial development on 170 acres east of the railroad tracks; active recreation (soccer fields) on 33 acres of pristine property at the southwestern corner of the site; and passive recreation and wildlife conservancy on the 240 acres west of the railroad tracks.

Some of the intergovernmental resources used for abatement, demolition and rehabilitation include:

- FY 99 \$275K HUD EDI Grant
- FY 00 \$5.0 mm DOD, FUDS, ACOE
- FY 00 \$925K HUD EDI Grant
- FY 00 \$100K EPA SRI Grant
- FY 01 \$7.0 mm DOD, Water Resources, ACOE
- FY 01 \$644K HUD EDI Grant
- FY 01 \$100K Virginia Derelict Structure Grant
- FY13 \$50K Brownfields Remediation Grant, VA DEQ, VEDP

In 2001, the Economic Development Authority (EDA) rehabilitated the existing administration building through the Virginia Historic Preservation Trust. This building now houses the offices of the EDA and other tenants, including the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Planning Commission.

In the fall of 2012, the physical clean-up and remediation was completed, and the process of reporting and cataloging all of the work began. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has completed its audit of the findings and, on September 20, 2014 will officially return the site to the Front Royal-Warren County Economic Development Authority.

During the remediation process: 65 acres of manufacturing buildings were removed; 200 tractor trailer loads of asbestos were removed; 4 fly ash basins were closed; 5 sulfate basins were closed; 11 viscose basins were closed; 18,000 gallons of fuel oil were recycled; 25,000 tons of steel were recycled; thousands of tons of steel, bronze and copper were recycled; 15,000 tons of coal were recovered; 1million cubic yards of fly ash were used for basin fill and grading; and

hundreds of thousands of tons of concrete and brick rubble were used for onsite drainage and fill.

In addition, 33 acres were developed into community soccer fields and a world-class skateboard park, and the EDA and FMC donated \$75,000 worth of glass lab ware from the Avtex laboratory to the public schools. The next project associated with the site is to fund and outfit the existing on-site museum, the Shenandoah Center for Heritage and the Environment, chronicling the history of the rich story of the manufacturing operations, the people who worked at the plant and the state-of-the-art clean-up and remediation process.

“It’s been a long, daunting and often discouraging process,” said Patty Wines, Chairwoman of the Economic Development Authority. “Every month at our Board meetings, John Torrence [site manager] would report to us on each tiny piece of progress. There were days we thought we weren’t going to get here. But, come take a look. We’re here! Truly, this is a time for celebration.”

“We are charting a new era for the Avtex site,” said Mayor Tim Darr, “and the future looks bright.”

The community is organizing a celebration to mark the milestone event. On Saturday, September 20, 2014, there will be a festival on the site (400 Kendrick Lane, Front Royal, Virginia) from 10:00am-4:00pm with exhibits, site tours, vendors, music and children’s activities. The public is welcome.

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(The press is invited to attend the Commemoration Program. We will provide a media room for photographs and interviews, and press kits. Please contact Marla Taylor Jones, Director of Marketing at the Economic Development Authority if you plan to attend so that we may include you on the attendees list, (540) 635-2182, jones@wceda.com. The Commemoration will take place at the Wastewater Treatment Plant on site at 400 Kendrick Lane, Front Royal, Virginia at 10:30am on Saturday, September 20, 2014. Travel to the Plant will be conducted through shuttles at the entry gate.)