



Historical Waratah Gasworks Site History

Gasworks operations

Site contamination exists in most urbanised areas in the world. Newcastle is no exception, particularly suburbs on or near former industrial land.

Although contaminated sites can occur anywhere, they are typically clustered in areas which have been used for heavy industry or chemically intensive agriculture.

Like other industrialised cities, Newcastle has contaminated sites that are the direct result of historical practices such as gasworks.

Over 60 former gasworks sites have been identified in NSW, including five sites in Newcastle.

Most NSW gasworks commenced operation in the late 1800s. Most ceased operating in the early- to mid-1900s and the last of the known gasworks was decommissioned in 1985.

History of the Waratah gasworks

In July 2016, Newcastle City Council (Council) received advice from the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) that a former gasworks may have operated on land bounded by Ellis, Turton and Georgetown roads at Waratah.

Council records did not contain evidence of any former gasworks at this location, but a review of historical sources confirmed that a gasworks operated at this site in Waratah from 1889 to 1926.

The Waratah Municipal Council gasworks opened in July 1889 on part of the Newcastle Pasturage Reserve administered by the NSW Department of Lands. The works was operated by Waratah Municipal Council to 1922, when it was leased to the City of Newcastle Gas and Coke Company until it closed in 1926.

Two years later Waratah Municipal Council sought tenders for the dismantling of a structure at the site in which coal was burned to produce gas and adjacent coal sheds.

Waratah Municipal Council was incorporated into the Council of Greater Newcastle under the Greater Newcastle Act 1937.

In addition, the historical Waratah Gasworks site was not included in the list of the locations of known gasworks sites maintained by the NSW EPA. Until this matter was brought to the EPA's attention by a member of the public, the site was not known to either the NSW EPA or Council.

Environmental Investigation

After a review of historical sources indicated that a gasworks may have operated at the site, Council engaged an independent environmental consultant to undertake preliminary and then a detailed environmental investigation. This investigation work occurred from late-2016 until late-2017. Findings from the environmental investigation and updates about management activities at the site are available on Council's website.

Contaminants associated with former gasworks

Gas manufacturing plants, known as gasworks, were used to produce town gas for heating, lighting and cooking. Gas was generated by heating coal. The resulting gas was captured, piped off and used as fuel.

The operation of gasworks throughout NSW has resulted in soil and groundwater contamination, which in some cases extends to adjoining sites. The major contaminants include tars, oils, hydrocarbon sludges, spent oxide wastes, ash and ammoniacal recovery wastes.

While many of these materials would have been removed, recycled or reused during the operation of the gasworks, it was common for some to be buried on or near the site (for instance in underground tar wells, liquor wells, pipes and purifier beds) and not removed when the gasworks were decommissioned.

For enquiries please call 4974 2000

For more information visit:
www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au



Health

Contaminants from former gasworks sites are likely to be located below ground level as materials were often buried both during operation and decommissioning. Exposure to potential gasworks products is therefore reduced by the presence of building cover, pavements, driveways and grass covering. Health effects from exposure to contaminants found on an old gasworks sites can range from minor skin irritations due to high or low pH through to more serious health conditions.

The risk of potential health effects from exposure to gasworks-related substances, is influenced by exposure pathways (e.g. breathing contaminated air, skin contact or ingestion), duration of exposure (time) and concentration (level) of exposure.

To mitigate potential exposure risk at the Waratah Gasworks site, Council recommended that residents and occupiers of other properties within the investigation area take precautions especially avoiding direct contact with areas of exposed bare soil, until further information was available.

Further health-related questions should be directed to Hunter New England Local Health District or general practitioners.

Contaminated land management

The Contaminated Land Management Act 1997 (NSW) sets out the role of the NSW EPA to deal with land contamination that is significant enough to warrant regulation under the Act, given the current or approved use of the land. If the NSW EPA determines that land is contaminated, and that the contamination is significant enough to warrant regulation, the NSW EPA may declare the land to be 'significantly contaminated land'.

Local councils deal with contamination under the planning and development framework on sites, which though contaminated, do not pose an unacceptable risk under their current or approved use. As the historical Waratah Gasworks was a former council facility, Newcastle City Council has played an active role in the environmental investigation.

In these cases, the planning and development process determines what remediation is needed to make the land suitable for a different use.

Remediating former gasworks sites

There are a number of examples from across Australia where former gasworks sites have been successfully remediated for a range of uses, including recreational and residential uses.

As a historically industrial city, there are many properties across Newcastle which have been investigated for a range of potentially contaminating land uses. Following investigation and/or remediation to confirm their suitability for use, these properties continue to be sold without ongoing concerns being raised with Council regarding impacts to property values.

Further information

Further information about the historical Waratah Gasworks, including detailed frequently asked questions and a map of the investigation area, is available by searching for 'Waratah Gasworks' on the Newcastle City Council website.

For enquiries about the environmental investigation, please contact Newcastle City Council's Regulatory Services team on 02 4974 2522, Monday to Friday, between 8.30am and 5.00pm.

For more information about related matters, please see contact details below:

- Specific health advice: Your doctor
- General health information: Hunter New England Local Health District: 1300 066 055
- Other contamination information: NSW EPA

Environment Line: 13 15 55.

