



Maryland Department of the
Environment

FACTS ABOUT: ELKTON GAS LIGHT COMPANY

Site Location

The Elkton Gas Light Company is a former coal gasification plant that occupied the southwest corner of South and Howard (formerly Water) Streets in Elkton, Maryland. The site is now the parking lot of the new Maryland District Court Building. The entire area of the former site is blacktop except the perimeter of the parking lot, which is grass covered and above grade from the surrounding area. During the years, the coal gasification plant operated, the southern end of the lot along Water Street was isolated by marsh and tidewater land, and the plant was accessible only from Main Street through Gas House Alley. The level of water in Big Elk Creek and the surrounding marsh influenced the flooding of the property. The area has since been graded and is no longer under tidal influence. No evidence remains of the former gas works.

Site History

The Elkton Gas Light plant was built in 1863 under the supervision of Mr. William D. Johnson and financed by John W. Baker & Company. The plant operated from 1864 until 1928. In 1929, a gas pipeline was constructed from Wilmington, Delaware to Elkton, and manufactured gas was piped in from Wilmington until 1959 when natural gas became available in Elkton.

The Elkton Gas Light plant produced gas from coal, probably using the carbonization process. Carbonization involved heating coal to a state of incandescence in retorts, which liberated the gas. Once the gas was volatilized, it was piped to a holder where the gas, in its crude form, cooled. Crude gas contained a number of impurities, which were removed prior to domestic use to provide a cleaner burning product. Upon cooling, tar, water and ammonia condensed from the gas as waste products. After the crude gas was cooled and by-products condensed from it, the gas was further cleaned to remove more impurities. The reaction removed sulfur and cyanide compounds, traces of tar, and ammonia from the gas. The disposal practices for coal tar and spent oxide by-products are not known. The exact volume of the tar tank and the disposal of any contents that may have remained in the tank are unknown.

The Elkton Gas Service, a division of Pennsylvania and Southern Gas Company, owned the former plant property until 1976, when the State of Maryland purchased the site to build the new Maryland District Court Building. Prior to the State's purchase of the



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property, the Elkton Gas Service used the property and remaining buildings for storage. The State of Maryland did all demolition and excavation at the former gas plant site prior to building the courthouse building. The new building, completed in 1983, is directly north of the former plant area.

Environmental Investigations

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) listed the Elkton Gas Light site because gasification was previously conducted at the facility, and recommended an investigation of the site because of problems noted during past inspections of similar gasification facilities regarding the disposal practices of by-product wastes. In 1986, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene prepared a *Preliminary Assessment* of the Elkton Gas Light Company site and recommended a low priority site investigation with appropriate sampling.

Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) revisited the site in the spring of 2012. CHS Enforcement Division conducted an SI on the former Elkton Gas Light property. Soil and groundwater samples were collected from the plants operational areas in order to determine if materials in the area continue to present a threat to human health and the environment. MDE determined that:

- The area where the coal gasification plant was located is now a paved parking lot
- Drinking water in the area is municipally supplied.
- Levels of soil and groundwater contamination were less than actionable levels.

Based on these determinations screening to evaluate the potential for vapor intrusion into building structures was not performed for this SI.

Current Status

This site is on the Brownfield Master Inventory (BMI) list that identifies potential hazardous waste sites in Maryland. The BMI includes sites currently identified by the EPA's Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Information System. EPA has given the site a designation of No Further Remedial Action Planned (NFRAP). The designation of NFRAP by EPA does not mean that the MDE has reached the same conclusion concerning further investigation at the site. The information contained in the fact sheet presents a summary of past investigations and site conditions currently known to MDE.

