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EPA gives South Carolina \$3.3 million for storage tank cleanup

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South Carolina will use \$3.3 million in federal stimulus money to assess and clean up 66 of its approximately 3,000 confirmed underground petroleum storage tank leaks that threaten groundwater and could threaten drinking water.

Underground storage tanks are a leading polluter of groundwater, according to the state Department of Health and Environmental Control. The most common contaminant in such tanks is benzene, a cancer-causing component of petroleum, according to Bill Truman of the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

They are generally located at current or former gas stations but can be found at trucking facilities and manufacturing sites, any place that stores petroleum products, Truman said.

DHEC's Don Siron said the agency chose properties for its cleanup list based on EPA requirements, which were properties where no responsible party could be located and sites that were shovel-ready. The sites weren't chosen based on severity.

Of the 66 to be cleaned up, Upstate sites include: U.S. 25, Princeton; Artillery Road, Taylors; West Main Street, Pickens; U.S. 176, Landrum; Woodruff Road, Greenville; West Main Street, Liberty; Wade Hampton Boulevard, Taylors; and East Main Street, Westminster.

"We don't have any immediate health hazards" because DHEC provides alternative safe water to people whose water supply could be affected by tank leaks, said Siron, director of DHEC's underground storage tank program.

Heather Bergerud Nix, co-director of Upstate Forever's clean air and water program, said, "Cleaning up leaking USTs is crucial to stopping the contamination of our groundwater supplies. Obviously, this is highest priority in areas where people rely on groundwater as their drinking water source. However, it's also tremendously important to the health of our lakes and streams since groundwater feeds them during dry weather."

Siron said, "We are poised and ready to begin work as soon as we receive the funding." Cleanup could be completed soon on some sites, but if groundwater is contaminated, it could take years to pump and treat it, he said.
