MD-194
Washington County

1891	Hagerstown American Light and Heat initiated coal gasification plant.
1949	Gasification plant dismantled.
1986	Waste Management Administration completed Preliminary Assessment
1991	NUS Corporation completed Site Investigation.

HAGERSTOWN AMERICAN LIGHT AND HEAT
Hagerstown, Maryland

Site Location

The former Hagerstown American Light and Heat site is just over 2.46 acres in size and located in Hagerstown, Washington County, Maryland. The site is located west of the intersection of Sycamore and Smith Streets. The terrain slopes very gently to the south.

Site History

From 1891 to 1949, the company operated a coal gasification plant for the residents of Hagerstown in the vicinity of 55 Sycamore Street in Hagerstown. Water gas was produced by "cracking" bunker "C" oil or gas oil in the presence of blue gas and steam. Live steam was injected into hot coal or coke in the absence of air. The resulting reaction produced a low Btu gas referred as "blue gas." This blue gas was enriched with petroleum oils to produce "carburetted water gas." The resultant gas cooled during condensation and a purifier box removed most of the residual wastes (tar, water, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide). Prior to the development of an industry to use coal tar in the 1890s, it was customary for small gas plants to dispose of the residual coal tar wastes on or near the site of production. Hagerstown American Light and Heat terminated operations in 1949 when natural gas supplied the residents of Hagerstown. Columbia Gas of Maryland purchased the western third of the former site in 1968 to establish the present field office.

Environmental Investigations

The Waste Management Administration conducted a Preliminary Assessment in 1986 to document site conditions and history at that time. NUS Corporation subsequently followed up this investigation with a Site Inspection report in 1991. Based on a 1926 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, NUS Corporation believed a pond east of the site might have been used to accumulate waste coal tar residues from the gasification process. In the Site Inspection, the sampling results for 12 surface and subsurface soils indicated elevated levels of benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, styrene, toluene, chromium, lead, mercury, nickel, cyanide, cadmium, and PAHs at 260 mg/Kg, 1,900 mg/Kg, 1,200 mg/Kg, 5,000 mg/Kg, 19,000 mg/Kg, 296 mg/Kg, 1,398 mg/Kg, 35.4 mg/Kg, 194 mg/Kg, 137 mg/Kg, 82.6 mg/Kg, 82.6 mg/Kg, and 390 mg/Kg, respectively. The NUS toxicological evaluation for this Site Inspection concluded most of the soil contamination occurred at four feet in depth with lead and PAHs being the primary contaminants of concern. NUS also concluded no risk would be posed to human health if contaminants were only found at depth. However, the NUS study only focused on the location of the suspected tar pond and did not include the entire plant.

Current Status

For the 1999 Cooperative Agreement with EPA, MDE is conducting a site survey of the Hagerstown American Light and Heat location. The Site Survey Initiative was proposed to reassess the status of those sites that were previously designated No Further Remedial Action Planned by EPA. This initiative is intended to determine if site conditions have remained stable, provide a current description of the site, and identify and address any new pathways for contamination. The initiative is also intended to determine whether the State should recommend further investigation by EPA, oversight by the State and no further investigation by EPA, or no further action be taken by EPA or the State and the State designate the site as a Formerly Investigated Site.