

## *Lessons from Tallevast*

While it is important that all petroleum sites be remediated to the extent possible, the issue presented by both the new statutes/rules and the Department's performance is more than one of just numbers. As 62-780.680, Fla. Stat., indicates, each of the contaminated sites places the state's drinking water supply which is its groundwater, surface waters, soil, and most importantly the thousands of private residential drinking water wells spread all across the state at risk. The sites cause environmental damage, but they also pose a direct threat to the health and safety of members of the public who are exposed to them.

This is something that should be obvious to the DEP, particularly after the agency (and, more importantly the public) has had to endure the after-effects of allowing site contamination to go unchecked. Leakage from above-ground fuel oil storage tanks in Manatee County was deemed restored by the Department in 1996 on property that has since come to be known as the Tallevast site. As a result of findings from studies concerning the situation at the property, the Department learned that highly carcinogenic volatile organic compounds (VOC) such as trichloroethene (TCE) and others were present in the groundwater. These VOCs had apparently been discharged into the environment by American Beryllium, "an ultra-precision machine parts manufacturing plant." Four years later, in 2000, Lockheed (the new owner) informed the FDEP that it had found this contamination on the site. The FDEP, however, waited almost four (4) years before it notified neighboring residents about the pollution. It was later determined that the contaminates had, in fact, contaminated the groundwater and the drinking water wells of those people. It appears from the data that we've reviewed for this report that the Department learned little from the Tallevast nightmare. Rather, the data strongly suggests that the Department, in choosing to remediate predominately those sites with lower scores, is needlessly exposing both

the public and the environment to risks coming from the other sites with significantly higher levels of contaminants. This has occurred, in part, because the Scott/Vinyard FDEP administration fired, forced to resign, or intimidated experienced FDEP employees. Those employees took with them the institutional knowledge needed to prevent another Tallevast nightmare.

###