Bioremediation in a Combined Remedial Strategy for a Complex Contaminated Site with Ecologically Sensitive Receptors in Brazil

Mariana de Q. Omote (momote@ramboll.com), Anderson C. Gatti, Gustavo D.C. de Mello, and Rafael Campos (Ramboll, São Paulo, SP, Brazil)

Background/Objectives. At a chemical industry site located in the State of São Paulo, Brazil, contamination of soil, groundwater and soil vapor by tetrachloroethene (PCE) and its daughter products (trichloroethene [TCE] and cis-1,2-dichloroethene [cDCE]) was identified at two source areas. cDCE was detected in groundwater within the main source area at concentrations up to 135 milligrams per liter (mg/L). Groundwater impacts extended to a nearby spring and river, and its associated natural preservation area, located about 200 meters (m) downgradient of the source areas. PCE and TCE concentrations were detected in soil vapor up to 6,500 milligrams per cubic meter (mg/m^3) and 1,300 mg/m^3, respectively, exceeding regulatory threshold values by three to four orders of magnitude.

Approach/Activities. In response to vapor intrusion risks, Ramboll installed an initial soil vapor extraction system (SVE Phase I) as an emergency measure in March 2017. The SVE system was expanded in June 2018 (Phase II) and September 2019 (Phase III). For the protection of the spring area, a sustainable approach was adopted - the treatment system consists of a small pre-existing artificial reservoir connected to four activated carbon adsorption columns, driven by gravity (without the use of electricity). In 2017, bench and pilot tests of in situ bioremediation (ISB), in situ chemical reduction (ISCR) and air sparging were performed at the plume edge, and an in situ chemical oxidation (ISCO) pilot test was performed in one of the hotspot areas. Excavation of the main source area was performed in January 2019 to remove the impacted soil, when pumping and recirculating tests were also conducted. The results of bench and pilot tests indicated that both ISCO and ISB techniques would be feasible. Because site groundwater is predominantly anaerobic such that dechlorination product cDCE was the contaminant with the highest concentrations, Ramboll recommended ISB as the preferred remedial approach. The operations of the full-scale remediation system started in May 2020. The system is composed of an ISB recirculating system with nine extraction wells and 13 reinjection wells, adding 1500 liters (L) of 5% sodium lactate solution as carbon substrate on a weekly basis; a hydraulic barrier with 12 pumping wells in order protect the river and its preservation area; a groundwater treatment plant for both the hydraulic barrier and the recirculating system; and a groundwater reinjection system with six wells installed upgradient of the plumes, to avoid off-site effluent water discharge.

Results/Lessons Learned. The vapor intrusion control systems provided an immediate reduction of PCE and TCE concentrations in sub-slab vapor, meeting the acceptable limits, in addition to maintaining a sub-slab minimum vacuum of 0.9 millimeters of water (mmH_2O) required by the local environmental agency. The spring treatment system proved to be effective in contaminant adsorption and, since its installation, the spring has met applicable regulatory standards. After two years of ISB operations, PCE and TCE are almost no longer detected in the industrial area groundwater and have achieved remediation goals. Based on the most recent groundwater sample results, dechlorination product vinyl chloride (VC) is present at only one location above the remediation goal. Terminal product ethene was detected throughout the treatment area after only one year of operations, where the prevalence of ISB-induced sulfate reducing, and methanogenic conditions are observed. Post-injection groundwater monitoring data interpretation will be presented, along with discussions of rationales regarding injection approaches and next steps.