

U.S. EPA to Investigate Underground Contamination

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be conducting activities in the Monterey Pines Development (MPD), Wilmington Middle School, the neighborhood directly east of Wilmington School and the nearby Carousel Tract to find out more about potential impacts from chemicals migrating in the soil (see map below). These chemicals were likely used by previous businesses prior to the area's current residential use. The need for assessing this area was prompted by the investigation of the Carousel Tract by the State of California. During the effort to identify the extent of the underground plume of contamination at the Carousel Tract, soil gas containing perchloroethene (PCE) and trichloroethene (TCE) was discovered under the MPD. In light of the discovery of these volatile organic compounds (VOCs), a supplemental assessment will be done to determine the extent of the underground plume of contamination and whether indoor air testing is warranted in any residences in the MPD, nearby schools or adjacent neighborhoods.

Indoor air can become contaminated by VOCs underground because these contaminants readily volatilize (turn to gas) from the soil, soil gas or groundwater and can get inside through cracks in the foundation or other means of entry. If indoor air problems involving these contaminants are discovered at levels considered potentially harmful, EPA will take action to mitigate the situation so that no residents, school staff or students are exposed.

To clarify why the federal EPA is now involved in this project, it is because of a lack of resources available to the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). Due to the fact that DTSC was not able to identify a responsible party to continue the investigation, the State requested EPA's assistance. Although the investigation of the Carousel Tract by DTSC and the investigation of the MPD by EPA are separate projects, there is some overlap that requires coordination by all involved agencies.



What Will EPA Be Doing?

EPA will conduct the investigation in two phases:

Phase 1—Residential soil and soil gas sampling

Approximately 20 bore holes will be drilled in streets throughout the neighborhoods to learn more about the underground plume and how far it extends. This will occur in early November. Following this, indoor air testing of potentially affected residences will occur sometime after Thanksgiving, depending on the completion of the bore hole sampling. Indoor air testing will be strictly voluntary. Prior to any such testing, EPA will meet with residents, explain our established processes for sampling and any recommended mitigation, and do our best to schedule all activities at the convenience of the resident.

Phase 2—Sampling of Wilmington Middle School

This will take place either over the Thanksgiving holiday break or Christmas break.

How Does EPA Test Indoor Air?

Indoor air testing consists of placing a Summa canister (stainless steel basketball-size canister with an intake wand on the top) indoors that pulls in air over a 24-hour period and is then sent to a laboratory for analysis. Results of the analysis will determine what, if anything, needs to be done to get rid of the problem.

How Does an Indoor Air Problem Get Fixed?

Mitigating an indoor air problem is a relatively simple procedure. In general, it involves venting the building by installing a pipe under the structure that collects the harmful air coming from below ground before it enters the structure and vents it outside into the air where it dissipates. The system

operates with a small motor and fan. Systems such as this are operated until the contaminants below ground no longer pose a potential health threat. Besides the near-term mitigation of any indoor air problems, a plan will be put in place to also address the source(s) of the contamination.

How Will the Community Be Kept Informed?

EPA will update the community as more is learned about the situation through fact sheets and/or community meetings. Our staff will be accessible to residents on a regular basis to answer questions and discuss all elements of our investigation and possible cleanup of the site. Residents should feel free to visit EPA's mobile command post which will be in the neighborhood during sampling activities. You may also contact either of the EPA staff listed below.



Monterey Pines Development

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For More Information

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