



Preventing Health Problems from Volatile Chemical Exposure

What are volatile chemicals? Why are they an issue in John Day?

Volatile chemicals, like gasoline or diesel fuel, sometimes get into soil or water. When this happens, they can produce vapors that enter nearby homes and businesses through openings in the foundation. This can lead to chemical odors in or around people's houses. Recently, several households in the South Canyon Boulevard neighborhood of John Day have noticed such odors.

What are the health effects of volatile chemicals?

Some people who breathe these vapors may develop headache, dizziness or nausea. These symptoms usually go away when the person moves into fresh air.

Breathing in these chemicals over months to years can increase the risk of several health problems. These include nerve injury and cancer of the blood (leukemia).

How will I know if there are volatile chemicals in my home?

If there are volatile chemicals in your house, you will typically smell a strong chemical odor. If this happens, call City of John Day Dispatch at 541-575-0030. They will tell people working to control the problem, who will contact you. If there is a chemical smell at home and you get a headache or feel nauseated, leave the house, and let your doctor know.

How do I deal with volatile chemical odors in my home?

The Oregon Health Authority and Grant County Public Health recommend airing out your house by opening windows and doors, or using a fan, if the level of volatile chemicals is not too high. That may

be all that is needed to get rid of the chemicals. If levels are higher, the most common solution is to install a system that removes the chemicals before vapors enter a home or business. These systems are similar to those installed in some homes to remove radon gas. They are commonly known as soil vapor vacuum systems.

Sometimes, the level of volatile chemicals may remain high even after efforts to decrease it. In this case, moving to another place for a while may be needed, until the problem is under control.

How are government agencies responding to the volatile chemicals in John Day?

The US Environmental Protection Agency, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the City of John Day are investigating potential sources for the volatile chemicals. EPA and DEQ are monitoring levels of VOCs in the affected houses to help ensure that ventilation and other mitigation measures are effective in reducing vapors. EPA or DEQ will keep the community informed if other steps should be taken.

The OHA's Public Health Division and Grant County Public Health are working with these agencies to protect the public from harmful chemical odor exposures.

If you have concerns about the health effects of vapors, call Grant County Health at 541-575-0429 or the Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division at 503-938-6790 (pager).