

EPA Begins Sampling Homes for Unsafe Fumes

Dry Cleaners Etc site
New London, WI

December 2021

For more information

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is beginning a vapor intrusion study this winter in the residential area near the Dry Cleaners Etc site. This study will help EPA determine if fumes from volatile organic compounds, or VOC's, are seeping into homes at unsafe levels. In October 2021, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources requested EPA's assistance after the responsible party notified the State agency that they were unable to continue site investigations.

Although VOC's can be found in common household products, exposure to high levels can affect your health. Short-term exposure can cause headaches and dizziness; eye, nose, and throat discomfort; irritation to your respiratory tract; and allergic skin reactions. Long-term exposure can cause damage to your liver, kidneys, and nervous system; and may also cause cancer. The VOC of concern at the Dry Cleaners Etc site is a chemical called tetrachloroethylene, or PCE, which is commonly used in the dry-cleaning industry.

EPA will contact owners and residents to schedule appointments for air sampling. The sampling process will take place over a 3-day period. On the first day residents will be asked to remove household VOCs from the sampling areas such as paints, disinfectants, hobby supplies, and automotive products. Removing these products will give EPA a more accurate understanding of the nature and extent of contamination caused by the dry cleaners.

EPA will return the next day to drill a small hole in the basement floor and seal vapor pins in place with cement. A device called a SUMMA canister is installed into the sealed vapor pin to collect sub-slab air samples. Drilling will not occur in other sampling areas. Instead, EPA will place a SUMMA canister on a flat surface to collect air samples overnight. The following day, EPA will remove the canisters to send to an EPA laboratory for analysis. EPA will fill or cap the drilled hole of the basement floor.

SUMMA Canister Installed in Basement



Canister Placed on Table to Collect Indoor Air Sample

Once the results are finalized, an EPA representative will contact you to meet and discuss the sampling results and discuss the next steps necessary to protect your air quality and health. If EPA finds low levels of VOCs from the collected air samples, then no further action will be needed. However, if vapors are at harmful levels, EPA will install a mitigation system that will draw harmful vapors from below your home and disperse them out into the outdoor air. The vapors are significantly diluted when released to the outside air and broken down by sunlight. After a mitigation system is installed, EPA will resample your indoor air to ensure the system is working properly.



Vapor mitigation system installed on the outside of a house.

EPA must have the property owner's permission to sample or perform any mitigation work. If you rent, please contact your landlord or talk to an EPA representative. We can contact them on your behalf.

Once a signed agreement is received, EPA's contractors will work with homeowners to schedule a convenient time to come to the property. This work is being done for public health and safety and will be at NO COST to property owners. The sampling team will follow COVID-19 guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control, the state of Wisconsin, and local government.

Site History

The Dry Cleaners Etc site is surrounded by a mixture of residential and commercial properties, including the New London Public Library. The property was a gas filling station from the 1930s to 1960. Dry cleaning operations, under several different owners, began from around 1960 to 2015. The exact source of VOC contamination is unknown but linked to historical dry-cleaning operations. Currently, the building is leased by a video game store.

An environmental repair case was created in August 2008 after the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, or WDNR, was notified of site assessment results from 1997. Soil sampling that took place in 2008 and 2010 indicated exceeding levels of VOCs in the groundwater. Additional groundwater sampling took place in 2010, 2011, and 2019. The results showed elevated levels of VOCs in multiple wells.

Concentrations of VOCs in soil and groundwater led to sub-slab vapor sampling of source building. A mitigation system was installed in source building in June 2021. Three off-site properties have been sampled for vapors.

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