



# Chillum Perc Site Chillum, Maryland

December 2003

*This community newsletter provides an overview of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and its response to community health concerns about the Chillum Perc site in Chillum Maryland.*

## What is ATSDR?

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is a federal public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It was created by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (also known as Superfund).

ATSDR's mission is to serve the public by using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information to prevent harmful exposures and disease related to toxic substances.

## How did ATSDR become involved with the Chillum Perc site?

The regional Superfund program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) contacted ATSDR about this site. EPA asked for ATSDR's public health recommendations about the presence of tetrachloroethylene (a dry-cleaning fluid commonly referred to as perc or PCE) and other chemicals detected in soil gas in the community.

ATSDR also received a petition from a concerned citizen requesting a public health assessment of a gasoline spill at the site.

Under Superfund, ATSDR conducts activities in communities affected by hazardous waste sites. ATSDR will conduct an investigation and prepare a health consultation to address EPA's and the community's health concerns about chemical contamination of groundwater and soil in the community.

## Where is the Chillum Perc site?

The Chillum Perc site is located at the intersection of Riggs Road and Eastern Avenue in Chillum, Maryland.

Contamination consists of a mixed PCE and gasoline plume that originated in Maryland and crossed into the

Lamond-Riggs Park community in Washington, D.C. The gasoline plume is from a service station that was formerly operated by the Chevron Products Company. EPA is investigating the source of the dry cleaning plume.



*The Chillum Perc site.*

## What is a Health Consultation?

An ATSDR health consultation provides advice on a specific public health issue related to real or possible human exposure to toxic material. It is the way ATSDR responds quickly to a need for health information on toxic substances and makes recommendations for actions to protect the public's health.

ATSDR staff evaluate information about toxic material at a site, determine whether people might be exposed to it, and report what harm exposure could cause. Health consultations may consider:

- what the levels (or "concentrations") of hazardous substances are
- whether people might be exposed to contamination and how (through "exposure pathways" such as breathing air, drinking or contacting water, contacting or eating soil, or eating food)

- what harm the substances might cause to humans (i.e., “toxicity” of contaminants)
- whether working or living nearby might affect people’s health
- other dangers to people, such as unsafe buildings, abandoned mine shafts, or other physical hazards.

ATSDR has begun addressing the chemical contamination of groundwater and the soil vapor hazards in the community. Contaminants being evaluated include PCE, benzene, and methyl tert-butyl ether (MTBE).

## What information is known about PCE, benzene, and MTBE?

At room temperature, PCE is a nonflammable liquid. It evaporates easily into the air and has a sharp, sweet odor. PCE is a man-made chemical that is widely used to dry clean fabrics, to degrease metals, and to make other chemicals and some consumer products.

Much of the PCE that gets into water or soil evaporates into the air. Once in the air, it is broken down by sunlight into other chemicals or is brought back by rain into the soil and water.

Benzene is a colorless liquid with a sweet odor. It evaporates into the air very quickly and dissolves slightly in water. It is highly flammable and is made from both natural processes and human activities. Benzene is widely used in the United States to make other chemicals that are used to manufacture plastics, resins, nylon, and other synthetic fibers.

It is also used to make some types of rubbers, lubricants, dyes, detergents, drugs, and pesticides. Natural sources of benzene include volcanoes and forest fires. Benzene is also a natural part of crude oil, gasoline, and cigarette smoke.

Methyl tert-butyl ether (MTBE) is a flammable liquid with a distinctive, disagreeable odor. It is made from blending chemicals such as isobutylene and methanol, and has been used since the 1980s as an additive for unleaded gasolines to achieve more efficient burning.

MTBE quickly evaporates from open containers and surface water, so it is commonly found as a vapor in the

air. Small amounts of MTBE may dissolve in water and get into underground water.

## What will happen next?

ATSDR is currently conducting an initial health consultation by examining soil vapor levels found in the residential area.

ATSDR evaluates all available information about contaminants identified at a site to find out whether current exposure might cause harm to humans. For this evaluation, ATSDR considers sources of information that may include:

- environmental data, such as information about contaminants and how people could come into contact with them,
- health effects data, including information on studies of humans and animals to evaluate whether the levels at which humans are contacting chemicals can hurt them, and
- community concerns, such as reports from the public about how the site affects their health or quality of life.

ATSDR representatives will provide the community with periodic updates about progress on the health consultation. A health consultation report will be available for review in late 2003.

## Where can I get more information?

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### Jane Zhu

ATSDR environmental health scientist  
1-888-422-8737\*

### La Freta Dalton

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1-888-422-8737\*

\*Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern time. When calling ATSDR’s toll-free number, please mention the Chillum Perc site, Chillum, MD. If you call after business hours, you may leave a message and someone will return your call.