

Michigan Department of Community Health

Fact Sheet for the

***“Atlas Powder Dump Area –
Determination of Public Health Implications”***

Health Consultation

A local citizen was concerned about a dump site near a former explosives company (Atlas Powder) and the number of cancers seen in the area.

The citizen wondered if there was contamination making people sick and talked to the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH).

MDCH asked the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to investigate the site.

The MDNRE and EPA conducted tests to find any buried drums or other debris and took soil samples at the site. They also analyzed groundwater from private wells at nearby homes. Chemicals that exceeded screening levels included lead and arsenic in soil, and iron and nitrates in groundwater.

MDCH reviewed the data to determine if there were risks to human health and concluded that:

1. Daily exposure to the lead found in the soil at the site may cause harm to children. Some very high concentrations of lead were found there. The site is located in the woods, and children might not play there often. Nevertheless, exposure should be prevented. Only a small portion of the entire Atlas Powder area was investigated. The rest of the area will need to be investigated before a remedy can be proposed.
2. It cannot be determined if frequent exposure to the arsenic levels found in the soil would cause harm. A few samples contained very high levels of arsenic. These sample locations generally were found at the same locations as the high lead levels. If exposure to lead is prevented, then exposure to arsenic will also be prevented.
3. Daily exposure to iron or nitrates in the drinking water should not harm healthy persons. Very few wells exceeded the screening levels. People with certain medical conditions may need to consult with their doctors.
4. The contamination discovered at this site is not likely to have resulted in the cancers reported by the citizen.

MDNRE sent the water testing results to the people whose wells were tested.

ATLAS POWDER DUMP AREA



The EPA report of the investigation is available at the EPA On-Scene Coordinator website:
http://www.epaosc.org/site/site_profile.aspx?site_id=4977.

The health consultation report prepared by MDCH is available at the MDCH Division of Environmental Health website: www.michigan.gov/mdch-toxics, under "Health Assessments and Related Documents."

For more information, please contact MDCH toxicologist, Christina Bush, at 1-800-648-6942 or bushcr@michigan.gov.

