



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Western Tar Products Contamination Investigation

Office of Land Quality – Federal Programs Section – Site Investigation

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Background Information:

- The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) began an investigation of the Western Tar Products site in 1999, when contamination was discovered at the former railroad tie creosoting facility located at 2525 Prairieton Road, Terre Haute, Indiana. This site is south of downtown Terre Haute, west of U.S. Highway 31 and bisected by Interstate 70 into north and south parcels just east of where I-70 crosses the Wabash River.
- The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) has completed various time-critical removal actions to attempt to mitigate potential off-site exposure to contamination, however, areas of contamination remain both on- and off-site and require additional investigation.
- The known contaminants include semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs), including polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) (e.g., benzo[a]pyrene, benzo[a]anthracene, naphthalene, etc.). Additionally, some volatile organic compounds (VOCs) (e.g., benzene, toluene, etc.) and total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPH) (diesel range and oil range organics) were detected in subsurface soil samples.
- SVOCs consist of a class of compounds with generally low volatility, meaning that these compounds do not vaporize or evaporate as readily as VOCs. These compounds deposit in the environment, often staying in liquid or semi-aqueous forms.
- PAHs are organic compounds composed of multiple aromatic rings. Exposure may lead to cancer, fetal development complications and cardiovascular issues.
- Certain chlorinated chemicals, referred to as dioxin-like compounds, are commonly associated with railroad tie creosoting facilities and wood processing and are highly toxic and persist in the environment.
- Chlorinated aromatic hydrocarbons are created unintentionally as byproducts of industrial processes when there is incomplete combustion leading to the formation of dioxin-like compounds.
- These chemicals are slow to degrade and bioaccumulate in biota due to their lipophilicity, which is the tendency for a compound to become stored in fatty tissues of animals and humans.
- The presence of these chlorinated compounds has not been investigated at the site and may pose a potential threat to human health and wellbeing of ecological resources (e.g., wetlands, fisheries, biota, etc.).
- Under a cooperative agreement with U.S. EPA, IDEM's Site Investigation Program will conduct a site inspection to determine the extent of impacted environmental media and evaluate whether wildlife, critical habitats or human food chain may be at risk.

Next Steps:

- During the fall of 2026, IDEM's Site Investigation Program will investigate in Terre Haute to determine if contamination present at the site may be a threat to human health and the environment.
- IDEM is requesting access to municipal property and on-site locations to collect groundwater, surficial soils, river sediments and subsurface soils to aid this investigation.

- Property owners who are asked to aid in this investigation will be asked to sign a property access agreement.
- The sampling will be done at no cost to the property owner(s).
- Results of the sampling will be provided to the property owner at no cost.

Environmental and Health Impacts:

- The majority of release-related impacts are applicable on-site and within adjacent parcels as well as sediments within the Wabash River. These substances tend to bioaccumulate in the food chain and can be found in shellfish, fin fish, waterfowl and other wildlife that use the surrounding areas as habitat.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has classified SVOCs, heavy metals, and dioxin-like compounds as known human carcinogens.
- People can be exposed to SVOCs, metals and dioxin-like compounds from ingesting contaminated water, sediments, or fish and fowl from contaminated water.
- These compounds pose a threat to all levels of the food chain and can impact critical habitats as well.

Additional Information:

- The public may direct questions and concerns regarding IDEM's environmental investigation in the Terre Haute area, including additional information on sampling results to date, environmental impacts of release-related compounds and ecological impacts, to John Hockemeyer, IDEM Project Manager, at 317-232-5675; toll free at 800-451-6027; or by e-mail at JHockeme@idem.IN.gov.
- Questions and concerns about health-related impacts should be directed to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) at 312-886-1462 or to the Vigo County Health Department at 812-462-3431.
- For information about IDEM's Site Investigation Program, visit IDEM's website at idem.IN.gov/cleanups/investigation-and-cleanup-programs/site-investigation.
- The news media may contact IDEM's media department, at 317-232-8596 or by e-mail at media@idem.IN.gov.