

# A Public Health Assessment Answers the Questions

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In 2004, Meg Harvey of the CT Department of Public Health made a presentation to residents on the Public Health Assessment conducted in the Newhall neighborhood. The purpose of the assessment was to answer two basic questions:

- What are the likely public health impacts from exposure to contamination?
- What further actions should be taken?

## Q: What Information Do We Use?

- Environmental Data
- Health Data
- Community Concerns

## Q: How Do We Make Decisions About Health Risks?

- We have to use accepted science methods
- We use health protective methods
- We try to determine if people have been exposed
- People must be exposed to high enough levels for long enough time to get sick

### BUT

- Exposure does not automatically mean you will get sick
- We don't have to prove people got sick – stopping exposure is very important!

## Q: How Can People Get Exposed At This Site?

- Contact with soil
- Eating, breathing dust, skin contact
- Activities include:
  - Gardening, other yard work
  - Children playing in soil
- No exposure from drinking water

## Q: How Do We Evaluate Exposure?

We use accepted science methods and health protective approaches

- How much chemical (concentration)?
- How does contamination enter a person?
- How long, how many times does exposure occur?
- How toxic is the chemical?

## Environmental Data Summary

Higher lead, arsenic, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in surface and subsurface soils at some locations

## Lead is Main Concern

- Found in more places, higher levels than other contaminants
- Children more sensitive
  - Blood problems (anemia)
  - Reduced growth and development
  - Lower IQ
- Testing blood is easy and can show recent exposure to lead (from any source)
- Lead exposure NOT linked to cancer at exposure levels in the neighborhood

## Public Health Assessment Conclusions

- Sample results from 2001 and 2002 show:
  - No public health threat from lead, arsenic or PAHs
- Even though no health threat, if contamination is above Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) standards, cleanup will be done.

**Past Conditions** (before the most contaminated yards were cleaned):

- Lead may have caused increased blood lead in children
- No signs that children in neighborhood have high blood lead now
- Health survey results do not look unusual
- Published cancer rates for Hamden do not look unusual

## Public Health Assessment Recommendations

- It is a good idea to reduce exposure to soil in your yard
  - We don't know where all the contamination is yet
  - Some yards have contamination above DEP cleanup standards BUT below Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) immediate cleanup trigger levels (for example, "Gray Area" yards)
- Further neighborhood soil/groundwater testing
  - Evaluation of data by Department of Public Health
  - Free blood lead testing
- Quinnipiac Health District community survey in larger portion of neighborhood

For more information about health issues, please read the Public Health Assessment available on the website, [www.newhallinfo.org](http://www.newhallinfo.org) (Health section).

Also in that section of the website there is a letter about a review by the CT Department of Public Health of cancer incidence in the Newhall neighborhood.