

Health Investigations at Wood Treating Sites

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) was established by Congress in 1980, under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, also known as the *Superfund* law. Since 1986, ATSDR has been required by law to conduct a public health assessment at each Superfund site. The aim of these evaluations is to find out if people are being exposed to hazardous substances, and if so, whether the exposures are harmful and should be stopped or reduced. ATSDR also receives requests from individuals and community groups to conduct public health assessments at non-Superfund sites. When appropriate, ATSDR conducts these investigations using its own environmental and health scientists. At other times ATSDR requests that the investigation be carried out by state agencies with which ATSDR has cooperative agreements.

Residents and community groups in areas neighboring active and closed wood treating sites have occasionally petitioned ATSDR for public health assessments. Most of these investigations have been carried out by state health agencies, under contract with ATSDR. These have included:

Arkansas Department of Public Health (“ADH”)

- Public health assessment of Koppers’ North Little Rock, Arkansas plant
- Examined cancer incidence in the zip code including the plant
- “[N]o indications exist that that exposure to air contaminants in the communities increased the risk of developing cancer reportedly linked to site contaminants.”
- ADH concluded that the plant “poses no apparent public health hazard.”

Illinois Department of Public Health (“IDPH”)

- Public health assessment for Koppers’ Galesburg, Illinois plant
- Evaluated community health concerns
- IDPH concluded that the site posed “no public health hazard.”
- “Workers may have been exposed to contaminants in the past, but no adverse health effects would be expected from these exposures.”

Texas Department of State Health Services (“TDHS”)

- Health Consultation for the Tronox, LLC Texarkana, Texas plant
- Evaluated the public health implications of contaminants found in three creeks in the vicinity of this closed plant.
- Reviewed several previous cancer cluster investigations for the area surrounding the plant.
- TDHS concluded, “Based on these cancer cluster investigations, there does not appear to be an increased cancer incidence in the Texarkana area that would be related to an environmental exposure.”
- TDHS also concluded, “Based on these birth defect investigations, there does not appear to be an increase in birth defects in the Texarkana area that would be related to an environmental exposure.”

Oregon Department of Health Services, Superfund Health Investigation and Education Program (“SHINE”)

- Cancer investigation for three neighborhoods surrounding the J.H. Baxter and Co. wood treating plant in Eugene, Oregon.
- Residents in three densely populated neighborhoods were concerned that there were excess rates of brain cancer and acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) related to contamination from the plant.
- SHINE investigated rates of AML, as well as brain, nasal and lung cancers.
- SHINE concluded “There were no statistically significant elevations for any of the cancers in the area investigated.”

Louisiana Department of Public Health and Hospitals Office of Public Health Section of Environmental Epidemiology & Toxicology (“SEET”)

- Public health assessment of area surrounding former Bayou Bonfuca wood treating site.
- Examined cancer rates in four census tracts surrounding the abandoned, former wood treating site. Study population was comprised of over 21,000 individuals.
- SEET determined that cancer rates for males living within one mile of the plant were significantly lower than expected for all cancers combined.
- SEET also concluded that that cancer rates for all women in the area were significantly lower than expected.