DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY State of Washington

Boeing Auburn Fabrication Site Cleanup

November 2017

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the problem?

In parts of Auburn and Algona, groundwater is contaminated with a degreaser called *trichloroethylene* (TCE) and its breakdown products. It is believed that the chemicals originated from Boeing's Auburn facility. The contaminated groundwater flows north and northwest away from the Boeing property under portions of northeast Algona and southwest Auburn. To date, the chemicals in the contaminated groundwater have been found at low levels that are not expected to pose a risk to human health and the environment. If future testing found levels that posed an immediate risk, Ecology would direct Boeing to take action to protect residents in the area.

When did the contamination occur?

TCE was used at the facility from 1965 until the early 1990s, so Boeing believes the contamination occurred during this timeframe. Use of TCE at the facility was phased out in the early 1990s, so there is no risk of additional contamination coming from the facility.

When did cleanup at the site begin and when will it end?

Ecology and Boeing signed an agreement in 2002 to formally start a cleanup at the site under Washington's toxics cleanup law. The first phase of that process, called the remedial investigation, began then and lasted until 2017. The investigation gathered information on the type of contamination and its extent. While the investigation was going on, Boeing did some cleanup work on their property and, in 2016, tested cleanup technologies at a site in commercial Algona.

In 2009, groundwater testing indicated for the first time that the contamination extended beyond Boeing's property. Ecology directed the company to expand its sampling to determine how far the contamination had spread. Responding to concerns from the community, Ecology began providing regular project updates to the cities of Algona, Auburn and Pacific beginning in 2011. Additional testing in 2012 indicated the contamination plume extended into Algona and Ecology expanded the investigation area again.

Because of the nature of the contamination, cleanup work and monitoring will likely continue at the site for many years to come.

Why is this process taking so long?

Boeing's cleanup must follow the state of Washington's cleanup process. This requires a thorough investigation of the contamination and of potential cleanup options. So far, the focus of the project has been the first phase of that process, called the Remedial Investigation, in which the type and extent of contamination is studied. The size and complexity of the contaminated area added to the work needed to complete the investigation. The next step will be developing a feasibility study, which will review possible options to clean up the contamination. As this work goes on, Boeing continues to test both groundwater and surface water at the site under Ecology's supervision.

Is the drinking water safe?

Yes. The water in homes and businesses in the area comes from public water systems that are regularly monitored by the Washington State Department of Health. The contamination discovered to date does not affect drinking water wells, and the direction of groundwater flow is away from the drinking water wells. Testing required by the Department of Health has not detected any chemicals of concern in public water systems in the past 10 years.

Private wells in the area are not monitored by the Department of Health. Contact Ecology if you have a private well.

Can I eat fruits and vegetables from my garden?

Yes. Tests at other contaminated sites - with higher levels of the chemicals found at the Boeing site - have shown that the chemicals do not build up in plants or fruits. Vegetables and fruits grown in this site's study area are safe for people to eat.

Are my pets safe?

Yes. Ecology compared the results of samples taken from surface water in Algona to a study conducted by the National Park Service on the impacts of TCE to wildlife. None of the samples Ecology evaluated are high enough to harm wildlife or domestic pets.

Is the sheen or discoloration in ditches related to this contamination?

TCE and its breakdown products are colorless and odorless at the concentrations found in groundwater and surface water. The sheen of rainbow colored film sometimes seen in ditches is not caused by the contamination.

Is there any work being done to clean up the contamination?

In 2016, Boeing conducted a pilot study to test bioremediation at a commercial area in northeast Algona. The pilot project reduced levels of TCE and related chemicals, demonstrating that this clean-up option has potential to reduce the concentrations of these contaminants to meet state cleanup requirements.

What can I do to stay informed and involved?

To stay up to date on the project, join our project ListServ. You can also email us at boeingauburnsite@ecy.wa.gov or call 253-219-7645. Ecology encourages feedback from the community on the cleanup process. Public comment periods are held at key points throughout the cleanup process.