



Frequently Asked Questions about Briggs Nursery: Porter soil site

From Ecology's Toxics Cleanup Program, Southwest Regional Office

Briggs Nursery, Inc. is conducting a cleanup of contaminated soil at its Olympia site under an agreement with the Department of Ecology (Ecology). The soils are contaminated with low levels of a chlorinated pesticide called dieldrin, and polychlorinated bi-phenyls (PCBs). As part of the remedial cleanup action, these sandy soils are being transported to Briggs' property in Porter to be used as a soil amendment to a clay rich field. The soils are being used in accordance with a permit issued by Grays Harbor County. Part of the county permit allows that pumpkins may be grown on site for three years. Pumpkins are known for their ability to take up chlorinated pesticides and PCBs from soils.

In June, Briggs' cleanup consultant, Entrix, notified Grays Harbor County and Ecology that some soil with concentrations of PCBs above the 'residential' standard (or limit) was mistakenly transported to the property in Porter. Ecology and the county have been working diligently with Briggs to identify the PCB soil and develop a plan for its removal. That effort has been successful and the misplaced soil should be appropriately removed and disposed next week.

Q: What are PCBs and dieldrin?

A: PCBs and dieldrin are both organic non-polar molecules that bond very well to other organics in soil. In other words, they do not dissolve in water and generally move only when they are stuck to soil particles. Dieldrin and PCBs have not been found in the ground water at the Olympia site even though these compounds have been at the Olympia site for decades.

Q: Where did the contamination come from?

A: Dieldrin is a chlorinated pesticide that was banned in the 1970s. At the Olympia site, dieldrin was found in former growing sites. It's assumed the dieldrin is a result of past, legal applications to crops. The PCBs are likely to have occurred as a result of legal pesticide use, also. Prior to the 1970s, it was legal to use oil containing less than 2 parts per million PCBs as a pesticide carrier. The PCB contamination at Briggs' Olympia site was also found in former areas used for growing.

Q: What is the Department of Ecology going to do about the PCBs mistakenly taken to the Porter site?

A: The Department of Ecology has thoroughly evaluated the PCBs which are present and verified what levels are protective of humans, wildlife and groundwater. The soils with PCB concentrations which are not protective of humans, wildlife and groundwater are going to be removed from the Porter site and placed in a landfill. Testing will be conducted to confirm that all of the PCB-contaminated soils are removed.

Q: What steps have to be taken to be sure this doesn't happen again?

A: Ecology is taking steps to make sure this doesn't happen again. Some of the steps are: 1) Monitoring field activities more closely. 2) Taking our own soil samples to compare with the soil samples taken by Briggs' consultant. 3) Having our state laboratory do a comprehensive review of the method used for assessing PCBs in soils used by the consultant. 4) Having Briggs' laboratory send us the results of the soil sample analyses directly, so we receive them sooner and can respond in a more timely way.

Q: Is well water safe near the Briggs field?

A: The Department of Ecology has thoroughly evaluated possible impacts to groundwater resulting from the placement of these soils in Porter. Given the strong bond these chemicals form with soil and the low amount of PCB and dieldrin present, we do not expect these soils to travel to groundwater or nearby wells.

Q: Are there other human health and safety concerns?

A: Human health and safety have been independently evaluated by Briggs' consultant, the Department of Ecology, Grays Harbor County and a consultant hired by the county. These independent evaluations all conclude that human health and safety will not be threatened by the placement of these soils at the Porter site.

Q: What is the goal of the project in Porter?

A: The goal in Porter is to amend the soil in a clay-rich pasture to be more amenable to crop production. This is also an innovative and cost-effective approach to dispose of a large volume of soils which are lightly contaminated with dieldrin.

Q: What is the Department of Ecology's role in these kinds of projects?

A: Ecology's toxics cleanup program oversees the clean up of contaminated sites in Washington. Ecology works with property owners, local governments, other state agencies, the legislature and community partners to achieve a cleaner and safer Washington. For this phase of the project, we are working closely with Briggs and Grays Harbor County to ensure that standards are being met and humans and wildlife are being protected.

Q: Who is responsible for cleaning up the contamination? Who pays?

A: Briggs Nursery, Inc. and Gary E. Briggs are responsible for all costs associated with the investigation and cleanup of the property in Olympia and transporting and spreading the soils in Porter. They also are responsible for all costs associated with tilling the fields where the soils have been mixed, and planting and harvesting the pumpkins for the next three years. Briggs also has to pay for the costs of removing the PCB-contaminated soils.

Q: What happens next?

A: Ecology will ensure the PCB soils in Porter are removed, as necessary. Testing will confirm this. Then the remainder of dieldrin contaminated soils will be transported from the Olympia site to the Porter site for mixing.

Q: Who can I contact for more information?

If you have questions about the project or have information to share, please contact Lisa Pearson, Ecology's site manager, at 360-407-6261 or e-mail her at Lpea461@ecy.wa.gov.

The news media should contact Ecology's public information officer, Sandy Howard, at 360-407-6239 or e-mail her at Srud461@ecy.wa.gov.

Ecology's website for this project contains additional information. The website address is: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/briggs/briggs_hp.htm

If you require this publication in an alternate format, please contact Cedar Bouta at 360-407-6245 or Cebo461@ecy.wa.gov.
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