



Tacoma Smelter Plume Cleanup Project

Overview

For nearly 100 years, Asarco operated a copper smelter in north Tacoma. Air pollution from the smelter settled on the surface soil across more than 1,000 square miles of the Puget Sound region. Arsenic, lead, and other metals remain in the soil because of this pollution. The state of Washington received settlement funds from Asarco to clean up residential yards and child play areas, conduct outreach, and provide technical assistance to properties during development. Our work is detailed in the 2012 Final Interim Action Plan.¹ This report outlines our programs and progress to date, including a funding outlook.

Risks to Human Health

Arsenic and lead are toxic metals that pose risks to human health if the contaminated soil is ingested or inhaled. While low levels of these metals pose no immediate danger to public health, long-term daily exposures raise risk of health problems. Lead is linked to developmental disabilities in children and may affect IQ. Arsenic may cause some types of cancers later in life and can contribute to heart disease. Children under age six are at greatest risk because they put things into their mouths.

Program Areas

The **Soil Safety Program** removes and replaces contaminated soil in licensed childcares, parks and schools. We have sampled over 1,200 sites and acted on nearly all 150 locations with elevated arsenic or lead. The Department of Children, Youth and Families requires new childcares to contact us regarding sampling before issuing a license. **Dirt Alert** is our outreach and education program. Our [searchable map](#)² shows locations we tested, properties that qualified for soil replacement, and those that had their soil replaced. The **Yard Program** offers free sampling and voluntary soil replacement to eligible residential properties. To date, we have

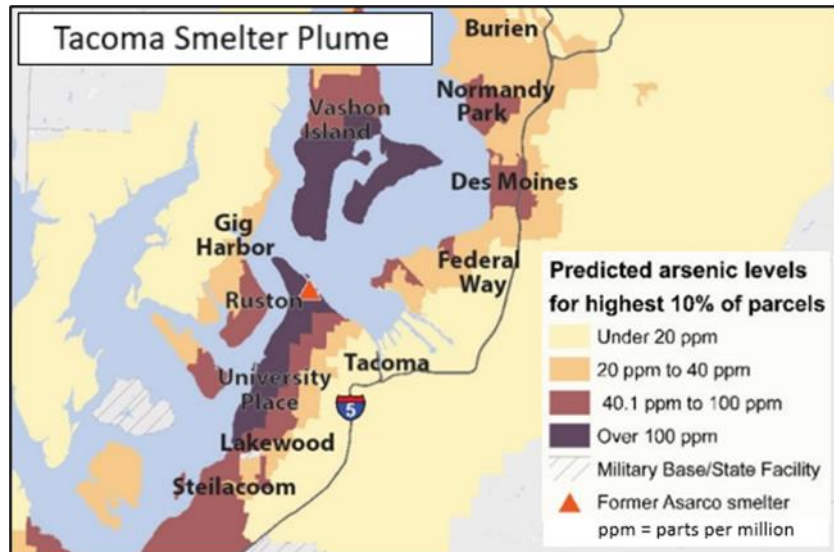


Figure 1: Map of predicted arsenic levels for highest 10% of parcels

¹<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1209086.html>

² <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/dirtalert>

found over 1,200 qualifying properties and have replaced the soil in almost 400 yards. The **Technical Assistance** Program offers guidance to developers to sample and clean up contaminated soil. To date, 3,535 acres have been sampled, with 2,187 acres showing elevated arsenic or lead. Cleanup has been completed on 1,361 acres.

Figure 2 below shows our soil replacement status from the Yard Program mentioned above. We anticipate replacing soil for about 25 properties in FY 2024-25.

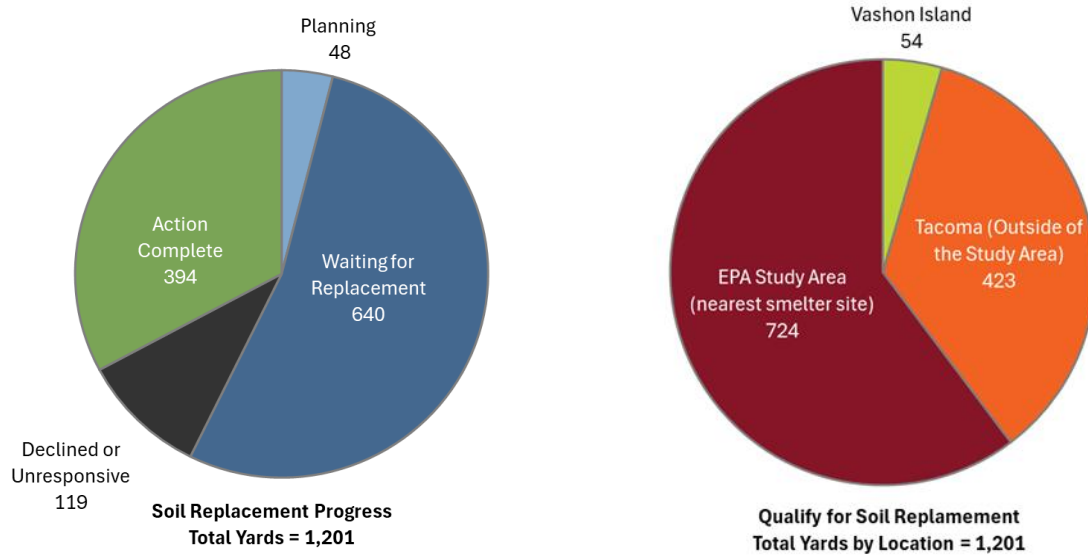


Figure 2: Left pie chart shows our progress replacing soil through 2024. Right pie chart illustrates the number of residential properties that qualify for soil replacement by area.

Funding

Asarco filed for bankruptcy in 2005, and the state of Washington received nearly \$95 million for liability associated with the Tacoma smelter in 2009. The funds were placed in an interest-bearing account established by the Legislature called the Cleanup Settlement Account (CSA). Each year, Ecology submits a mandated [report to the Legislature](#)³ that shows how we use the Cleanup Settlement Account (CSA) to distribute funds to specific projects, including the Tacoma Smelter Plume Project. To date, we’ve spent just over half of the funds. If the current rate of spending and yard replacement continues, the remaining funds are estimated to run out by the 2029-31 Biennium.

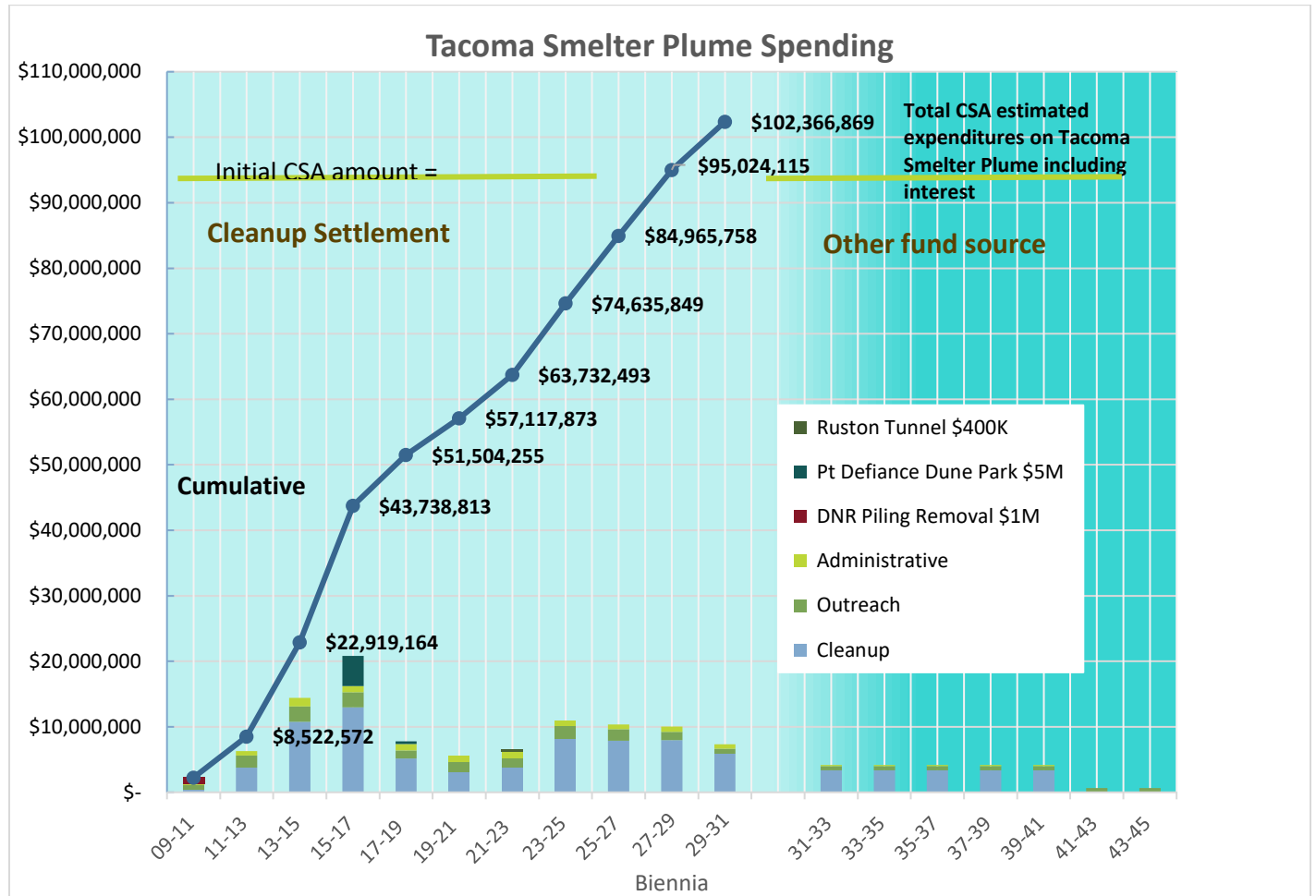
Challenges

The Yard Program replaces the soil of about 50 residential yards per year, and we’ve cleaned up about one-third of all eligible yards. By 2029-31, we estimate that approximately 250 of the nearly 1,200 yards qualifying for soil replacement will still need cleanup. With an estimated \$20 million in additional funds, we will be able to complete the remaining yard cleanups and

³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/our-programs/toxics-cleanup/tcp-legislative-reports#CSA>

continue outreach in impacted communities. Timelines and financial numbers are both subject to change, as factors such as inflation can alter how much work current funding can support.

The chart below shows past and projected spending.



Looking Ahead

The Tacoma Smelter Plume Interim Action Plan includes plans for Phase 2 work with realtors, developers, and continuing outreach. In the upcoming year, we will be exploring the following:

1. How to effectively help new home buyers and realtors understand what it means to live in the Tacoma Smelter Plume.
2. What resources will help realtors talk to clients about living near contaminated soil.
3. How to work with local governments to explore ways to incentivize developers to seek technical assistance and cleanup of contaminated soil.

Publication information

This report is available on the Department of Ecology's website at <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/ecy/publications/SummaryPages/2409108.html>

Related Information

[Final Interim Action Plan for the Tacoma Smelter Plume \(wa.gov\)](#)

Contact information

Toxics Cleanup Program

Southwest Regional Office

Author: Marian Abbett

P.O. Box 47775

Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Phone: 360-489-4569

Website: [Washington State Department of Ecology](#)

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