

# Living in the Tacoma Smelter Plume

You are receiving this newsletter because you live in the Tacoma Smelter Plume area. This newsletter from the Washington Department of Ecology provides updates about cleanup activities on Vashon-Maury Island.

Para leer este anuncio en español, visite nuestro sitio web en: **Dirtalert.info**

## Arsenic and Lead in King and Pierce County

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.

**There is no immediate danger to human health and the environment.** However, the contaminants that remain in the soil can have negative impacts. Long-term daily exposure raises the risk of health problems.

**Arsenic** may cause some types of cancer later in life and contribute to heart disease. **Lead** is linked to developmental disabilities in children and may affect IQ. People may breathe in dust or accidentally swallow soil containing arsenic and lead. These actions can contribute to health problems, especially in children. Children under age six are at greatest risk because they put things into their mouths and are still growing and developing.

The State of Washington received settlement funds from Asarco to fund cleanup activities in three areas:

- Child play areas
- Residential yards
- Promoting healthy actions

## Healthy Actions

The easiest way to protect you and your family from arsenic and lead is to **avoid swallowing or breathing in** contaminated soil.

- Wear gloves when working outside and wash your hands with soap.
- If you grow vegetables, scrub them well and peel root vegetables. Consider growing vegetables in raised beds with clean soil.
- Wash children's toys frequently.
- Cover bare patches of soil where children play.
- Wipe your pet's paws after outdoor play.
- Take your shoes off at the door.
- Mop and vacuum often.

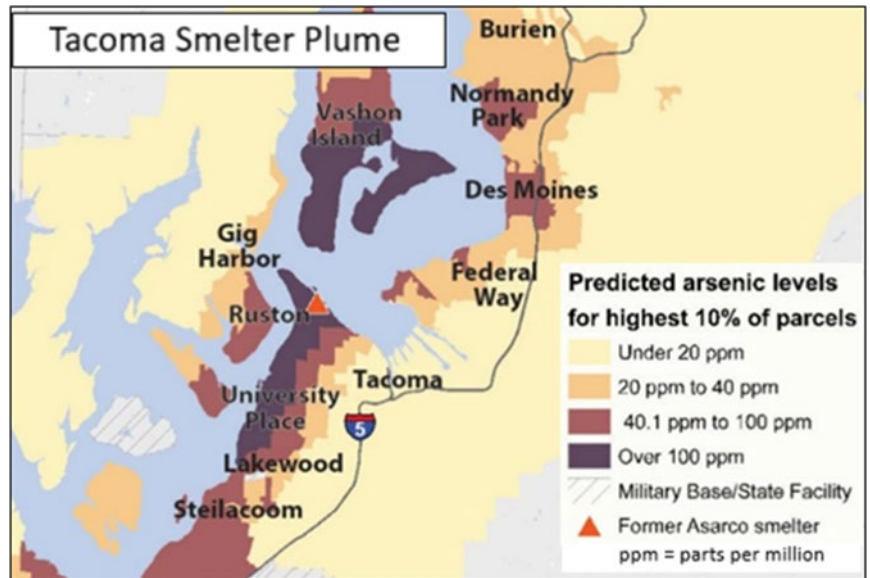


Figure 1 Predicted arsenic levels

## Residential Yard Sampling & Cleanup Program (Yard Program)

The Yard Program offers free sampling and soil replacement services to eligible residential properties with the highest soil contamination in the plume.

The map on the right shows the Yard Program boundaries. We have found over 1,200 properties that qualify for soil replacement in the Yard Program service area. Nearly 400 of these properties have received soil replacement through our voluntary program. On Vashon, we've cleaned up 35 of 54 eligible properties.

Please use the Dirt Alert map to check the eligibility and cleanup status of residential properties.



### Dirt Alert!

The online Dirt Alert Map shows which residential properties are eligible for the Yard Program, sampling results and cleanup documents.

To access the Dirt Alert Map, scan the QR code on the left or visit [Ecology.wa.gov/DirtAlert](https://ecology.wa.gov/DirtAlert)

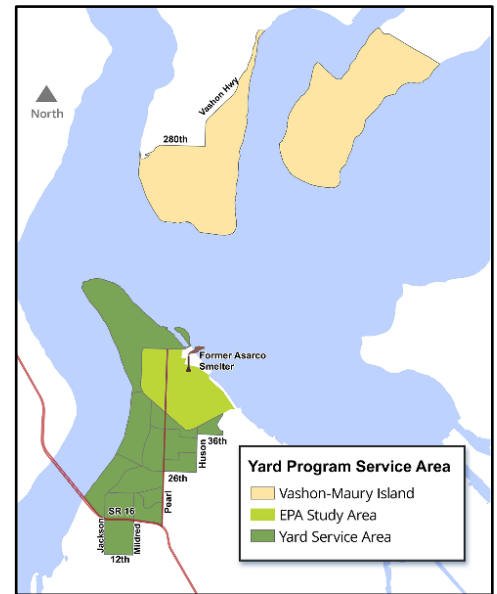


Figure 1:Yard Program Service Area

## Educational Sampling

Ecology offers free educational sampling for residential properties not located in the Yard Program service area. This sampling is most helpful for areas where young children play, areas with exposed soil or for areas where you garden. Email Justin Zakoren, Yard Program Manager, at [Justin.Zakoren@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Justin.Zakoren@ecy.wa.gov) for information.

## Real Estate Information

If you are buying or selling a home in the Tacoma Smelter Plume area, refer to the Dirt Alert map to see if the home has been sampled or received cleanup. Sellers must fill out **Form 17** and declare known contamination to buyers during sales. Please seek legal advice if you have questions about filling out this form.

## Protecting Children

The Soil Safety Program works with licensed childcares, parks, and schools to protect children. We have sampled and tested over 1,000 existing play areas with local health departments in King, Pierce, and Thurston counties. Through this effort, we have found over 100 areas with elevated arsenic or lead levels and completed soil safety actions on nearly all of them. Examples of soil safety actions include:

- Removing contaminated soil and replacing it with clean soil
- Covering soil with a physical barrier
- Posting informational signage

## Property Development (Voluntary Cleanup Program)

We provide **free technical advice** to property owners and developers who clean up arsenic and lead contamination. Ecology is currently working with multiple properties in King and Pierce counties to remediate soil contamination during development. Email Diana Ison, Voluntary Cleanup Program Manager, at [Diana.Ison@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Diana.Ison@ecy.wa.gov) if you are developing property inside the plume and are interested in the program.

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## News from Public Health Seattle-King County

Public Health Seattle-King County supports Ecology's work in the Tacoma Smelter Plume by sharing Healthy Actions with residents and community organizations. Healthy Actions are simple steps we can all take to reduce contact with arsenic and lead in soil. Public Health Seattle-King County also works with partners to host educational events such as soil testing events.

### Vashon Island soilSHOP – October 22, 2024

On October 22, 2024, Tilth Alliance hosted a successful soilSHOP at Kathy's Corner on Vashon Island. This free event gave residents the chance to have their soil screened for arsenic and lead and learn how to garden safely. Public Health Seattle-King County and Ecology collaborated on this event.

Residents received on-the-spot results using handheld X-ray fluorescence (XRF) devices, generously lent by Public Health's Hazardous Waste Management Program. Each participant received a personalized results letter with clear guidance and healthy actions for reducing exposure.

**Thank you** to all our partners and community members who made this event a success!

#### Event Highlights

- **Community Outreach:** Tilth Alliance promoted the event through The Beachcomber and Facebook. Tilth also hosted an informational training session ahead of the soilSHOP to teach residents how to collect a soil sample that would give accurate results.
- **Hands-On Support:** Dirt Alert staff participated in both the training and the soilSHOP, offering technical support, answering questions, and helping residents understand their results.
- **Educational Resources:** Attendees received practical guidance on safe gardening practices, healthy soil, and how to reduce exposure to arsenic and lead. Ecology staff were also present to share information on the Yard Program and soil safety.
- **Community Engagement:** Public Health's Communications helped extend outreach by sharing a soil collection guide on the social media community app Nextdoor.

#### By the Numbers:

- **35** community participants
- **49** soil samples screened
- **4 samples** tested at moderate for arsenic and lead
- **45 samples** were below levels that Ecology consider a risk for long-term health impacts



Toxics Cleanup Program  
PO Box 47775  
Olympia, WA 98504-7775



## • Contact information

Sarah Miller  
Sarah.Miller@ecy.wa.gov  
360-999-3186

## ADA accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 360-999-3186 or email at Sarah.Miller@ecy.wa.gov, or visit [ecology.wa.gov/ADA](https://ecology.wa.gov/ADA). For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.