Tacoma Smelter Plume Annual Update

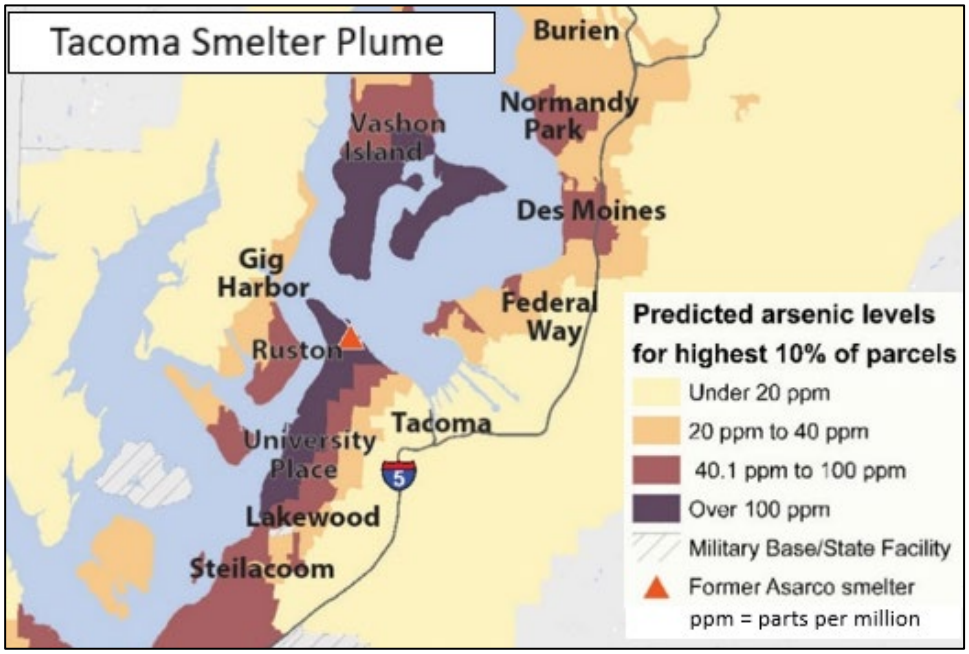
This Department of Ecology annual newsletter provides updates about our efforts managing contamination left by the Asarco Smelter. We send it to everyone living in areas most affected by the Plume.

Arsenic and Lead in 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.**

The State of Washington received settlement funds from Asarco to fund cleanup and educational activities. These activities include:

- Cleanup of child play areas and residential yards.
- Promoting healthy actions.
- Advising property developers.



Map of predicted arsenic levels

Risks to Human Health

Arsenic and lead are toxic metals that can pose risks if ingested or inhaled. They are not absorbed through the skin.

Arsenic and lead in soil do not pose an immediate health risk. However, long-term exposure increases the risk of certain health problems.

- **Lead** is linked to developmental disabilities in children and may affect IQ.
- **Arsenic** may cause some types of cancer later in life and contribute to heart disease.

Children under age six are at greatest risk of contamination exposure and impacts. This is because they put things into their mouths and are still growing and developing.

Healthy Actions

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

Other healthly actions include:

- 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.
- Take your shoes off at the door. Wipe your pet's paws after outdoor play. Mop and vacuum often.

Ecology Program Updates

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. To determine if a property is eligible, view sampling results, and download any available cleanup records, refer to the Dirt Alert Map below.

- About 1,200 properties qualify for soil replacement in the Yard Program service area. 415 of these properties have received soil replacement so far through our voluntary program.
- This year we are cleaning up 40 Tacoma yards and are in planning to clean up 47 properties in 2027.

Dirt Alert!

Dirt Alert! is a program in partnership with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. Dirt Alert! provides information, resources, and outreach to communities living in the Tacoma Smelter Plume. The Dirt Alert Map shows which residential properties were tested, which properties qualified for soil replacement, and which properties had their soil replaced. **Scan the QR code at right** or visit **Ecology.wa.gov/DirtAlertMap.**

DIRT ALERT MAP

Real Estate and Renters

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 had soil sampling done or was in the Yard Program. Sellers must fill out **Form 17**, which asks about known contamination. Please seek legal advice if you have questions about filling out this form. If you are renting, use the Dirt Alert map to see if your yard has been sampled for arsenic and lead and follow Healthy Actions. Contact dirtalert@tpchd.org with questions.

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 in King, Pierce, and Thurston counties. Through this effort, we have found over 100 play 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, and posting informational signage.

Property Development

We provide free technical advice to property owners and developers who clean up soil contamination. Arsenic and lead from the Plume are usually in the top six inches of soil. Development, especially through digging and grading, is a great time to take care of contaminated soil and reduce risks for future residents.

VCP

To receive Ecology's written approval of cleanup, the property must enroll in our **Voluntary Cleanup Program (VCP).** Getting written approvals via the VCP is free for projects that only deal with Tacoma smelter plume contamination**.**

To reach our Technical Assistance webpage, **scan the QR code** or visit **Ecology.wa.gov/BuildinginTSP**

In Tacoma, these properties are currently enrolled in the VCP: Hunt Middle School, Pearl Street Family YMCA, Tacoma Community College, Watchtower Heights, Crown Residences LLC, former Arcadia Montessori, Orchard Cottages, Quick Quack Tacoma 6th Avenue, and Franke Tobey Jones Phase I and III Development.

If you are developing property inside the plume and are interested in joining VCP, please contact Diana Ison at Diana.Ison@ecy.wa.gov. She can help answer any questions and get you started in the cleanup process.

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department News

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department supports Ecology's work in the Tacoma Smelter Plume by sharing **Healthy Actions** with residents. Healthy Actions are simple steps we can all take to reduce contact with arsenic and lead in soil. In the last year, the Health Department promoted these Healthy Actions:

- **Handwashing.** The Health Department gave handwashing presentations to 570 Kindergarten and first grade students at local schools.
- **Covering bare soil.** The Health Department provided 92 residents with two free bags of play chips to cover bare patches in their yard where kids play.
- **Shoes off inside.** The Health Department handed out over 1,000 door hangers reminding people to take their shoes off inside. This reduces exposure to arsenic and lead in the home.
- **Know the arsenic and lead levels in your soil.** The Health Department sampled soil for 12 new homeowners in the Yard Program area. In addition, 136 residential properties in the larger Tacoma Smelter Plume area and 3 childcare facilities were sampled.

Get Covered with FREE Mulch!

When kids play outside and get dirty, they can be exposed to arsenic and lead. Covering bare patches of soil with mulch can help protect them while they play.

To see if you're eligible to receive splinter-free play chips, visit tpchd.org/getcovered or scan the QR code.

FREE Mulch

Did yard work leave you with soil to get rid of?

Because you live in the Tacoma Smelter Plume, your soil may be contaminated with arsenic and lead. You should **not** offer your soil as free fill dirt. Small amounts of contaminated soil can be disposed of with your garbage pick-up, but large amounts need special consideration. You'll need to take extra precautions to protect your health and the health of others. Questions? tpchd.org/homes/dirt-alert-tacoma-smelter-plume/resources/

Healthy Yards in the Tacoma Smelter Plume

Natural yard care offers practical, effective ways to lower risk from contamination while building a beautiful, resilient landscape.

Start by keeping soil covered. Apply 2–3 inches of organic mulch to bare areas to prevent contaminated dust from becoming airborne. Plant groundcovers, shrubs, or deep-rooted perennials to stabilize soil.

Build healthy soil with compost. Adding organic matter improves soil structure, helps bind contaminants, and increases water retention—meaning your soil holds moisture longer and requires less frequent watering. Healthier soil supports stronger roots and more resilient plants. If you grow food, use **raised beds filled with clean soil**, wash produce thoroughly, and peel root vegetables.

Department of Health Contact Information

For more information about these Health Department programs, please call Chris Matter at 253-649-1853, or email DirtAlert@tpchd.org

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

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WA STATE DEPT
OF ENTERPRISE SRVCS
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Contact information

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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. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

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

Former Asarco Smelter (now Pt. Ruston)