Fact Sheet, November 2008

DEPARTMENT OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES CONTROL

The mission of the Department of Toxic Substances Control is to provide the highest level of safety, and to protect public health and the environment from toxic harm.

State of California

Cal/EPA

Santa Susana Field Laboratory
Area I Burn Pit Investigation

Radium discovered during sampling

Background:

In late September, Boeing began implementing the DTSC-approved workplan to investigate the Area I Burn Pit. The workplan requires Boeing conduct an initial radiologic scan of soils prior to chemical sampling. During the radiologic screening, radium-containing soils were discovered at discrete locations in this area. This conclusion is based on a preliminary analysis of two soil samples submitted to a laboratory for analysis.

Area I Burn Pit where radium has been detected in soils

Current Conditions:

The radiation levels, found at nine localized areas and measuring several inches to one foot in diameter, ranged from 20 to 115 microrems per hour. Natural background level is 12 microrems per hour. Within several feet of the impacted soils, radium levels decreased to background levels.

At this time, approximately fifty percent of the Area I Burn Pit has been screened for radiation. With the discovery of radium, the radiologic screening has been accelerated and will be completed in the next few weeks. Soil samples from the affected locations were sent to an independent laboratory, and the complete results should be available in several weeks. All results will be shared with the public as soon as they are available.

What is the Origin of the Radium?

The source of the radium is not known. Further evaluation is underway to determine the source and investigate the presence of other radionuclides, including those known to be in Area IV. A likely source of the radium is from luminous paint on instrument dials. Radium was widely used for this purpose on watch dials, clocks, instruments, and government equipment from the early 1900's to the 1970's. The paint was made of radium, zinc sulfide and a glue binder. The zinc sulfide gives off light when struck by the radioactive particles. It glows all night without exposure to light. This paint was used on many different products made by several different companies until its use was banned.

Is the Public at Risk?

Because this area is not accessible, DTSC does not believe the public is at risk. In addition, Boeing has fenced and posted signs in the areas where the elevated levels were found. Boeing plans to stabilize the area with erosion control and tarping to prevent sediment movement down the drainage until the investigation is complete and the area is cleaned up.

Exposure to high levels of radium over long periods of time may result in harmful effects, such as anemia, cataracts and various types of cancer.

Next Steps

Under DTSC and California Department of Public Health (CDPH) oversight, Boeing is performing additional screening to locate additional radium and the potential presence of other radionuclides. The public will be informed as more information becomes available.

Who to Contact for Information:

If you have any questions about the project or cleanup activities, please contact:

Susan Callery

DTSC Public Participation Specialist

(818) 717-6567 or toll free 1-866-495-5651 (press 3, then 4)

Or email at scallery@dtsc.ca.gov

Media Inquiries:

Jeanne Garcia

DTSC Public Information Officer

(818) 717-6573

jgarcia1@dtsc.ca.gov

Notice to Hearing-Impaired Individuals

You can obtain additional information about the site by using the California State Relay Service at 1 (888) 877-5378 (TDD). Ask them to contact Susan Callery regarding the Santa Susana Field Laboratory project.