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Note to Correspondents: March 6, 2002

ATSDR RELEASES VASQUEZ BLVD & I-70 SITE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSESSMENT

What: The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, today released its draft public health assessment for the Vasquez Boulevard and I-70 (VBI70) site.

Reporters may interview ATSDR staff about the health assessment today at a **media availability session** from 2-3 p.m. at the Swansea Recreation Center, 2650 East 49th Avenue, Denver.

The VBI70 site includes the northeast Denver neighborhoods of Swansea, Elyria, Cole, Clayton and southwest Globeville.

EPA took soil samples from about 75 percent of the residential properties (some 3,000) in the VBI70 study area and tested them for arsenic and lead. Test results show that some residential properties have high levels of arsenic and lead in soil. ATSDR's public health assessment describes the health implications of arsenic and lead in soil.

ATSDR's Findings: Some preschool children eat large amounts of soil (about one teaspoon at a time) while playing and exploring their world. This is called soil-pica behavior. ATSDR is concerned that about 650 properties sampled so far have arsenic levels in soil that might pose a public health hazard for preschool children who have soil-pica behavior and who eat unusually large amounts of soil. Arsenic in soil may make some preschool children with soil-pica behavior sick.

Based on demographic information, ATSDR estimates that about 300 preschool children live at these 650 properties. Somewhere between 12 and 60 of these children might have soil-pica behavior during their preschool years.

Soil arsenic levels are also a concern for people who lived as a child at a property with high levels of arsenic in soil and continue to live there as adults. These people could have a higher chance of getting certain kinds of cancer. EPA has identified about 260 properties where the increased risk of cancer is unacceptable.

Some VBI70 properties have high levels of lead in soil that are a health hazard to children living at those properties. Exposure to lead contaminated soil might increase children's blood-lead levels, causing harmful effects in children.

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ATSDR Recommendations: ATSDR made several recommendations to local, state and federal agencies to address the public health issues about arsenic and lead in soil. ATSDR recommended that EPA reduce exposure to arsenic and lead in properties where soil arsenic and lead levels are a health concern. ATSDR also recommended that EPA analyze soil samples from the remaining properties and from neighborhoods outside the VBI70 site.

ATSDR Activities: ATSDR will hold a series of identical public meetings from March 7-9, 2002. Each session includes a public meeting lasting one hour followed immediately by a poster session for one hour. Residents can choose the meeting time most convenient for them to individually speak with ATSDR staff during a poster session. No appointment is necessary. The meeting times and locations are:

Thursday, March 7

Swansea Recreation Center
2650 E. 49th Ave., Denver
Public meeting 4:00-5:00 p.m.
Poster session 5:00-6:15 p.m.
Public meeting 6:30-7:30 p.m.
Poster session 7:30-8:30 p.m.

Friday, March 8

Harrington Elementary School
2401 E. 37th Ave., Denver
Public meeting 4:00-5:00 p.m.
Poster session 5:00-6:15 p.m.
Public meeting 6:30-7:30 p.m.
Poster session 7:30-8:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 9

Swansea Rec. Center
2650 E. 49th Ave., Denver
Public meeting 9-10 a.m.
Poster session 10-11 a.m.

ATSDR is conducting an environmental health intervention project to train local health care providers about arsenic and lead poisoning. ATSDR also is working with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the University of Colorado to conduct a health investigation into soil-pica behavior at the VBI70 site.

Community members wishing to review the ATSDR public health assessment for the VBI70 site will find the report at the following repositories on or about March 6, 2002:

Cross Community Coalition

2332 E. 46th Ave., Denver
Tel: (303) 292-3203
Hours: Mon. - Thurs.
9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Globeville Community Resource Center

4400 Lincoln St., Denver
Tel: (303) 295-0171
Hours: Mon. - Fri.
8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Valdez-Perry Branch Library

4690 Vine St., Denver
Tel: (303) 295-4302
Hours:
Mon. & Tues. 12:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Wed. & Thurs. 12:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Sat. 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Ford Warren Branch Library

2825 High St., Denver
Tel. (303) 294-0907
Hours:
Mon. & Thurs. 10:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Tues. & Wed. 10:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Sat. 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Records Center

999 18th St., North Terrace, 5th Floor, Denver

Tel: (303) 312-6473

Hours: Mon. - Fri., 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

The public comment period for the health assessment is from March 5 to April 22, 2002.

Written comments about the document should be mailed to:

Chief, Program Evaluation, Records and Information Services Branch

ATSDR, 1600 Clifton Road, NE, Mailstop E-56

Atlanta, GA 30333.

Comments received during the public comment period will be logged and become part of the administrative record for the health assessment. Comments (without indication of who made them) and responses will be included in an appendix to the final health assessment. Although names of those who have submitted comments will not be included in the final health assessment, they are subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act.

Community members who cannot attend the sessions and desire additional information about ATSDR activities at the site should contact health assessor David Mellard, toll free, at 1-888-42-ATSDR (1-888-422-8737) or ATSDR Regional Representative Chris Poulet in Denver at (303) 312-7013.

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Members of the news media are requested to make an appointment to interview ATSDR staff. Phone Mike Groutt or Kathy Skipper in the ATSDR Office of Policy and External Affairs at (404) 498-0070.