

Mongmong Residents Meet with Health and Environmental Agencies about Health Concerns



Guam Department
of Public Health
and Social Services



Guam
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The Guam Environmental Protection Agency (Guam EPA) requested that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS) investigate community exposure to chemical contamination from the Agana Power Plant.

ATSDR is a public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The agency's mission is to prevent harm to human health and diminished quality of life from exposure to hazardous substances found at waste sites, in unplanned releases, and in other sources of pollution present in the environment.

ATSDR, Guam DPHSS, and Guam EPA listen to Mongmong residents

On May 9 and May 10, ATSDR and Guam DPHSS met with Mongmong residents to gather information about chemical exposure, including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), from the Agana Power Plant. Public availability sessions were held to give individuals and families an opportunity to talk privately with public health representatives about health concerns/problems.

Health-related concerns reported by Mongmong residents included:

- lung cancer
- leukemia
- asthma
- stomach cancer
- Parkinson disease
- arthritis

Residents also expressed concern about eating fish and other foods found in the Agana Swamp and the safety of foods that are raised or grown in the community (e.g., chicken, other meats, fruits, and vegetables). Other questions focused on the quality of soil, drinking water, well water, breathing

contaminants discharged into the air by the Agana Power Plant (in the past), breathing PCB contaminated dust, chemical warfare material and landfill hazards in the community.

ATSDR, Guam DPHSS, and Guam EPA will provide updates to the community as information becomes available to protect residents from further exposure to contamination. ATSDR will also address the concerns in the public health assessment document.

What is a public health assessment (PHA)?

In the public health assessment, ATSDR looks at whether people are or may be exposed to contamination, including PCBs, and whether they will get sick from the exposure.

In making these decisions, ATSDR looks at three primary sources of information:

1) Reports from the community about how the contamination affects health or quality of life is a key part of the public health assessment.

To obtain additional information about community concerns, village growth, and land use, ATSDR and Guam DPHSS met with:

- *Community members*
- *Clergy and members of the Mongmong Parish*
- *Village Elders*
- *Former staff of the Agana Power Plant*
- *Historians with the University of Guam*
- *Professionals with the University of Guam who have knowledge about contamination in the Agana Swamp and River.*

2) Health data, including available information on community rates of illness, disease, and death compared with rates for other populations.

3) Environmental data, such as information about the contaminants and how people could come into contact with them. ATSDR conducts an independent review of available environmental data. Maps, data, and reports were collected from the following sources:

- *Guam DPHSS*
- *Guam EPA*
- *University of Guam*
- *Guam Department of Agriculture*
- *U. S. Army Corp of Engineers*
- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*
- *U.S. Geological Survey*
- *U.S. Department of Agriculture*
- *U.S. Navy*

The PHA will identify activities that are needed to protect residents from the contamination present in the community. It will also contain recommendations to other government agencies (for example, Guam DPHSS, Guam EPA, U.S. EPA, U.S. Navy, or the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers) about appropriate actions necessary to protect public health.

What did ATSDR find during the visit to Guam?

Low levels of PCB contamination were found in the soil samples that were tested. On the basis of these results, ATSDR does not expect to see adverse health effects from the low level of exposure to soils.

Because of the projected low level of exposure and the levels of PCBs commonly found in human blood,

blood testing for PCBs would not likely provide useful information or be helpful in making a health decision.

What will happen next?

The Guam DPHSS, ATSDR, and Guam Memorial Hospital sponsored continuing medical education training sessions on May 19 for local physicians and health care providers to discuss methods for evaluation of chemical exposure, including PCBs and skin diseases. About 80-100 medical practitioners attended the training.

ATSDR will continue working with Guam DPHSS, Guam EPA, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and others to investigate the extent of contamination, level of exposure, and ways that Mongmong residents could be exposed to contamination. If information is found that would assist residents and physicians in making decisions about their health care, it will be released as soon as possible.

By the fall of this year, a summary document will be released providing more information about ATSDR's findings and a timeline of projected activities.

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When calling the ATSDR toll-free telephone number, please mention that you wish to discuss the AganaPower Plant Site.

(Ld 6/2000)