

Anniston, Alabama Newsletter

No.3
August 2001

ATSDR
AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

Gardening in Anniston and Calhoun County

What has ATSDR been doing to answer Anniston's concerns about gardening and what is their recommendation? A recent EPA survey of about 250 households in West Anniston indicates that just less than half of the surveyed household residents enjoy gardening activities. Approximately 2,000 to 3,000 land parcels of the West Anniston and Snow Creek flood plain basin are residential. Therefore, a potentially large number of Anniston residents might come in contact with soil contaminants through gardening.



Because of this, and the many requests from the community about the health implications of gardening, ATSDR has started a program to address your concerns. The program focuses on how residents can lessen their contact with soil contaminants (lead and PCBs) while gardening and also when eating fruits and vegetables they grow.

ATSDR is reviewing available scientific reports to better understand the principals of how chemicals might be transferred from contaminated soil into produce. Also, through a cooperative effort with the U.S.

Environmental Agency, the Calhoun County Cooperative Extension System, Auburn University, and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, a strategy is being devised to provide:

- community wide gardening education,
- methods for home owners to reduce potential exposures,
- recommendations for soil testing and gardening practices, and
- future collaborations to ensure safe gardening in Anniston.

Realizing that applying many good simple gardening practices can substantially lower exposure to soil contaminants, and considering the dietary importance of fresh fruits and vegetables, it is recommended that Anniston residents continue to grow and reap the benefits of home garden produce.

If I am concerned about chemical contamination of my soil what can I do to lower my exposure? As you know, lead and PCB contamination has been found in the soil in some areas of Anniston. However, you don't have to give up those delicious homegrown tomatoes and vegetables. Consider these gardening tips.

- Add clean compost or soil to your garden. This will not only help your garden grow better, it will also reduce the concentration of contaminants in the soil.
- Be sure phosphate and pH levels do not fall below recommended values. Your county extension office can help evaluate your soil. (334) 844-1047.
- Avoid working your garden when it is windy or when the soil is too dry. To do so produces contaminated dust. Using mulches will help eliminate dust.
- Don't eat or drink while in the garden.

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After you have worked in the garden or perhaps harvested some of those green beans, squash, potatoes, etc., here are some tips to help you further reduce the amount of contamination in your home.



- Remove shoes before entering the house. Have a pair of “gardening shoes” that you can leave outside. Clean them outside before you bring them into the house.
- Wash your hands and arms carefully to remove garden dirt and dust.
- Wash your clothing.
- Wash your vegetables and fruits carefully and thoroughly. Add a little vinegar to the wash water. This will help remove dirt and contaminants from their surfaces.

Another aid to lessening your exposure to contaminants is to consider purchasing some vegetables from the farmer's market or the grocery store to add to your home grown vegetables.

By following these simple steps, you will greatly reduce the amount of your exposure to contaminated soil and still enjoy your gardening and all those good home grown fruits and vegetables.



ATSDR Conducts Blood Lead Screening in Anniston

Lead poisoning can cause serious health effects among children under the age of 6, including learning and behavioral problems. Because children with elevated blood lead levels do not develop clinical symptoms,

screening is necessary to identify children who may need environmental or medical intervention. During April and May, ATSDR screened 410 children for their blood lead level at the following locations: Hall Head Start, Constantine Head Start, Norwood Boys and Girls Club, Cobb Elementary, and Wellborn Elementary. The RMC Wellness Connection Bus collected the samples. Parents and pediatricians will receive the child's results by mail. A summary of the

information collected will be available to the community later this year. We appreciate very much the help of all the people who made this project a success, especially the Community Against Pollution citizens group for educating the residents of Anniston about the dangers of lead poisoning and encouraging parents to participate.



For more information about lead poisoning and screening opportunities for your children, please contact any of these sources:

- the Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Project at 334-206-2966
- the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-5323, and
- the National Lead Hotline at 1-800-532-3394.

Your Doctor Can Test You for PCBs

Your doctor can test your blood, body fat, or breast milk to find your PCB level, but at this time, there is no medication that can remove PCBs from your body.

A blood test is the easiest and safest method to test for these chemicals. These tests can tell you: 1) whether you have come in contact with PCBs, and 2) if your PCB levels are higher than people in other areas. These tests can not tell you: 1) the exact amount or type of PCBs in your body, 2) how long you have been in contact with PCBs, 3) where the PCBs came from, and 4) whether you will get sick from the PCBs.

ATSDR does not plan to test Anniston Residents for PCBs. If you have concerns or believe you may have come in contact with PCBs, you should talk with your doctor. He or she can test you for PCBs.

ATSDR Finalized Reports

ATSDR will finalize several reports evaluating possible chemical exposure in the Anniston Area. Our most recent documents are summarized below.

Evaluation of Soil, Blood, & Air Data from Anniston, Alabama: This health consultation evaluated soil, blood, and air data collected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and community groups. It determined that PCB levels in some residential soils represent a public health hazard and that some individuals have elevated blood PCB levels.

Evaluation of Lead in Residential Surface Soil from Anniston, Alabama: This health consultation evaluated soil lead levels in various properties located in West Anniston. Its findings concluded that some residential soil lead levels represent a public health hazard.

Evaluation of Lead in the Surface Soil at the Oxford Lake Softball Complex: Also a health consultation, this report evaluated lead levels in the soil of the softball complex near Anniston, concluding that the soil lead levels were below health concern levels.

When finalized, these reports can be found at the following locations:

Anniston Public Library

108 East 10th Street

Carver Library

722 West 14th Street

Community Against Pollution Headquarters

1012 West 15th Street

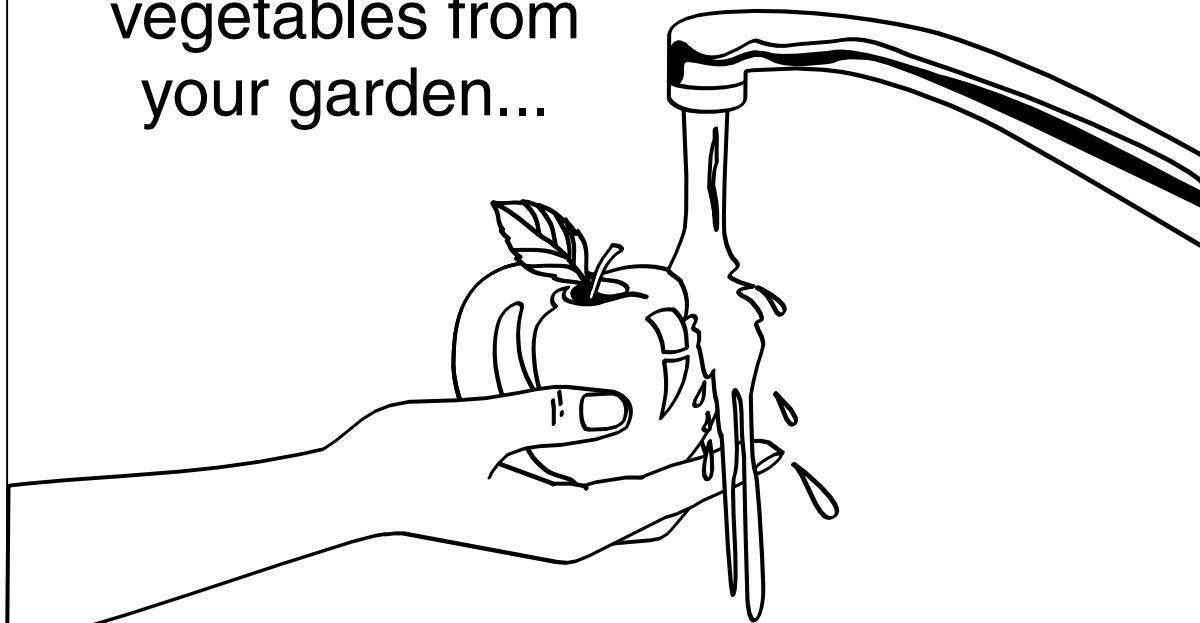
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Anniston Office

1313 Noble Street

Parents!!!

The best way to keep PCBs and lead from getting into children's bodies is by being sure children frequently wash their hands. Remind your children to wash their hands especially well after playing and before eating. Talk with your children about PCBs and lead contamination and the importance of washing their hands. There is a picture for your children to color on the next page that has a wonderful message.

Before eating
fruits and
vegetables from
your garden...



...wash your food!

For more information,
contact ATSDR's toll-free information line:

(888) 42-ATSDR... that's (888) 422-8737

ATSDR's Internet address is <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>