

# ATSDR

AGENCY FOR TOXIC SUBSTANCES  
AND DISEASE REGISTRY

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry is pleased to provide this community newsletter to the residents of the Spring Valley community. This newsletter is the first in a series to be issued every 6 months. It is intended to provide local residents with information on ATSDR and its activities related to the Spring Valley site. We value and welcome the opinions and comments of the Spring Valley residents. We remain committed to doing all that we can to provide you with a scientifically sound health investigation and with other actions that address your health concerns.

Sincerely,



Robert C. Williams, PE, DEE  
Assistant Surgeon General  
Director, Division of Health Assessment and Consultation

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## What is ATSDR?

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is a federal public health agency based in Atlanta, Georgia. Created by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (known as Superfund legislation), ATSDR's mission is to serve the public by using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information to prevent harmful exposures and disease related to toxic substances.

## Why is ATSDR involved at Spring Valley?

In March 2001, ATSDR received a petition for a full and complete environmental health assessment of the American University Experiment Station/Spring Valley site.

In addition, in June 2001, the District of Columbia Department of Health asked ATSDR to evaluate

whether some residents of Spring Valley had been exposed to arsenic.

## How will ATSDR evaluate health concerns at Spring Valley?

ATSDR will conduct an exposure investigation for arsenic and prepare a public health consultation on the potential for adverse human health effects from exposure to hazardous substances at Spring Valley.

## What is an exposure investigation?

An exposure investigation collects information on specific human exposures to hazardous substances in the environment. On the basis of past environmental sampling at the Spring Valley site, ATSDR has determined that certain residents may be more at risk for arsenic exposure than other residents. ATSDR is proposing biomedical testing for those residents who may be at a higher risk.

## How will ATSDR find out if a person has been exposed to arsenic?

Whether a person has been exposed to arsenic may be determined through laboratory analysis of samples of that person's hair or urine. Urine samples are useful only in detecting recent exposure (within a couple of days of the sample collection). Hair samples, under certain conditions, may detect exposure that occurred weeks or months earlier. In response to community concerns about past exposure, ATSDR may look at both hair and urine samples to get a more complete picture of arsenic exposure.

## What is a public health consultation?

A public health consultation is conducted to evaluate specific public health issues related to real or potential human exposure to hazardous substances. Focusing on specific issues allows

ATSDR to respond quickly to a need for health information regarding possible exposure to hazardous substances. A public health consultation document may include recommendations for actions to protect public health.

## What is a route of exposure?

A route of exposure describes how a chemical contacts or enters a person's body. The following are possible routes of exposure.

- **Ingestion**- eating or drinking something with a chemical in or on it
- **Inhalation**- breathing air that has a chemical in it
- **Skin/Dermal Contact**- touching something that has a chemical on or in it

## Will I get sick if I have been exposed?

Most people who are exposed to a chemical do not get sick. A combination of factors determine whether you will get sick from an exposure. These factors are

- **Duration**- how long the exposure lasted
- **Frequency**- how often the exposure occurred
- **Concentration**- the concentration level of the chemical at the point of exposure

## What if I have a concern that ATSDR has not addressed?

ATSDR is in the process of determining the community's needs in regard to health education and community involvement materials. We are also gathering general concerns regarding the Spring Valley site. Please forward any concerns or comments to Loretta Bush, ATSDR, 1600 Clifton Road, NE (E-54), Atlanta, GA 30333 or by e-mail at [lsbush@cdc.gov](mailto:lsbush@cdc.gov).

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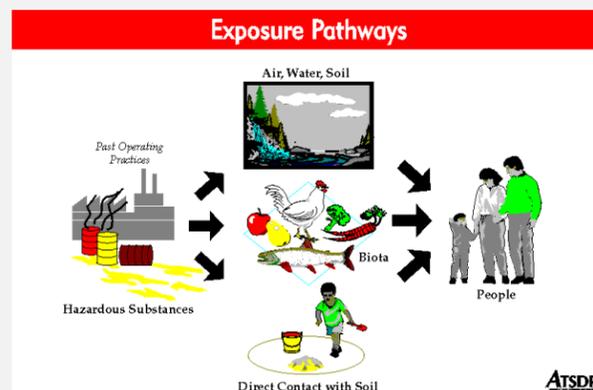
## For additional information, please contact any of the following ATSDR representatives.

Laura Frazier, Environmental Health Scientist  
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1-888-422-8737  
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## What is an exposure pathway?

Exposure pathway is a term used to describe the route- or pathway- from the source of a chemical to the point where a person may come into contact with the chemical. A person can not be affected by a chemical unless the person comes into contact with the chemical. A complete exposure pathway includes all the links

between a chemical source and the person exposed. A complete exposure pathway must have each of the following five elements.



- a chemical source
- an environmental medium in which the chemical moves (such as air, water, or food)
- a point of exposure (a place where a person could contact the chemical)
- a route of exposure
- a person or persons who could be exposed

**For more information about other ATSDR activities,  
visit ATSDR's Internet homepage at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>**