



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Fact Sheet

Helena Chemical Company Site
Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

August 2005

Background

The Helena Chemical Company (HCC) facility, which covers one city block located in the city of Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas was used for pesticide formulation from 1950 to 1972. Residential areas surround three sides of the facility. Soil samples collected in 1980 from the HCC site and surrounding areas indicated elevated concentrations of various pesticides. As a result of the lawsuit filed on behalf of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) against the two former owners of the facility, HCC and the Tex-Ag Company, these former owners entered into a consent decree to clean up areas of the contaminated properties. In 1982 the most highly contaminated soils on the HCC property were excavated to a depth of six inches below ground surface, combined and reburied at the HCC facility in a soil repository. The repository was covered by a six-inch layer of caliche followed by a one-inch layer of asphalt. Neighboring properties were also cleaned up at that time. In 1983 a Federal District Judge in Brownsville, Texas, ruled that all cleanup activities specified in the consent decree were complete.

From December 2002 through February 2003 the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) sampled soil and groundwater at the HCC site as part of a larger investigation of surrounding residential and commercial properties. Those sampling activities included the installation of six temporary water level meters (now removed), six soil borings, and surface soil sampling at seven other locations. Laboratory analytical results from that sampling effort indicated that organochlorine pesticides (the most abundant class of pesticides handled at the Helena facility) were present at several locations in concentrations exceeding the Texas Risk Reduction Program Tier 1 Protective Concentration Limits for Commercial Industrial sites (Shaw 2004). Subsequently, TCEQ cleaned up the yards in the neighborhood surrounding the site.

Current Actions

On August 23, 2005, the EPA Region 6 Response and Prevention Branch staff will begin environmental sampling at the HCC facility. On the facility property, the focus of the EPA investigation will be the repository constructed in 1982, the former facility operations areas and structures. EPA expects this work to last about four days. EPA will collect approximately 120 soil samples from below the surface by using 24 soil core holes located in three areas: within the existing contaminated soil repository under the asphalt cap; beneath building floors; and, within former operations areas. EPA will also collect wipe samples of interior surfaces to check for pesticide contamination that may be present on interior walls, ceilings, and floors of a former mixing plant, an adjacent warehouse, and a small shed. EPA also plans to collect two samples from two aboveground storage tanks. To ensure quality control, EPA will also collect approximately eight Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) samples. The final number of samples collected on site may vary due to site constraints. The samples will be analyzed to determine organochlorine pesticide contaminant levels on surface and underground soils as well as within building walls, floors, and ceilings, and at the two aboveground storage tanks.

All samples will be analyzed by commercial laboratories where personnel will validate all data results. The analyzing laboratories will utilize criteria contained in EPA guidance documents so that reliable and accurate data will be reported. EPA will receive the results from the laboratories after which we will review and analyze the sampling results. We expect to present the information to the community approximately two months from completion of the sampling event. EPA will also seek community feedback, including information on any potential future EPA actions.

Public Health Issues

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is the federal agency created under the Superfund Act charged with taking responsive public health actions to prevent harmful exposures and disease related to toxic substances. The ATSDR works in close collaboration with local, state and other federal agencies, with tribal governments, local communities and with local health care providers. The goal of ATSDR is to help prevent or reduce the harmful effects of exposure to hazardous substances on human health. ATSDR staff will be working with the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS) to help address health related issues at the Helena Chemical site. To address any public health question associated with this site or learn more about the process, please contact Richard Beauchamp, MD, with TDSHS at 800-588-1248. ATSDR and the TDSHS encourage active public participation in this process.

For More Information

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All media inquiries should be referred to Dave Bary,
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On the Web

USEPA Region 6:
www.epa.gov/region6 or
www.epa.gov/region6/superfund

For specific site information refer to:
www.epaossc.net/helenachemicalmission