

Questions from residents of the Conrail Superfund site.

So far no direct link has been shown between exposure and illness. An informal health study was started in late 2000 but is not yet complete.



Conrail Superfund Site Elkhart County, Indiana

Location, Contaminants and Questions

The boundaries of the Conrail Superfund site include but are not limited to: Baugo Creek in St. Joseph County to State Road 19/Nappanee Street, Saint Joseph River South to Old US 33/Norfolk Southern rail yard.

What is a Superfund site?

In the past, some hazardous wastes were dumped on the ground, in rivers, or left out in the open. As a result, thousands of uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites were created. These sites pose threats to public health and our natural resources. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) regulates these sites through a law known as Superfund. Superfund locates, investigates, and cleans up hazardous waste sites throughout the United States to protect people and the environment, and return the land to productive use.



How did this area become a Superfund site?

Numerous complaints were received between 1962 and 1986 regarding oily discharges from the railroad and spills of products such as diesel fuel, hydrochloric acid, caustic soda and a variety of petroleum-related substances. The complaints included reports that track cleaning substances and engine degreasers were used and disposed of at the rail yard. In June of 1988 the site was proposed for inclusion on the National Priorities List (NPL) after the identification of two well-defined groundwater contamination plumes: Trichloroethylene and Carbon Tetrachloride. The NPL scores sites based on the amount of contamination and risk to the population surrounding the site.

Trichloroethylene (TCE)

Trichloroethylene is a nonflammable, colorless liquid with a somewhat sweet odor and a sweet, burning taste. It is used mainly as a solvent to remove grease from metal parts, but it is also an ingredient in adhesives, paint removers, typewriter correction fluids and spot remover. It may be present in underground water sources as a result of the manufacture, use and disposal of the chemical. Breathing and/or drinking large amounts may damage the liver, kidneys and nervous system.

Carbon Tetrachloride



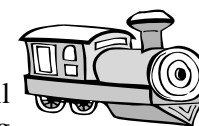
Carbon Tetrachloride is a manmade compound that does not occur naturally. It is a clear liquid with a sweet smell that can be detected at low levels. Exposure to Carbon Tetrachloride results mostly from breathing air, drinking water, or coming in contact with soil that is contaminated with it. This is most likely to occur around hazardous waste sites or in the workplace. In people, exposure to very high amounts of Carbon Tetrachloride can damage the liver, kidneys, and nervous system.

Past:



To eliminate the potential health threat of contaminated water, between September of 1994 and December of 1996 municipal water was extended to 1135 homes in the Superfund site. Thirty-five homes, for different reasons, refused to accept the city water supply. New homes built in the area are required to connect to municipal water thus eliminating exposure to contaminants.

Present:



Contamination in the Conrail area has been identified using monitoring wells for groundwater and soil gas vapors. The USEPA, Indiana Department of Environmental Management and consultants for Conrail continue to work on defining the best locations for systems to remove the contamination. Special emphasis is being placed on areas in the Conrail yard and the Osceola drag strip properties. Vapor extraction systems have been required for all new home construction in the affected areas as a safeguard against future health problems.

Future:



Installation of wells to remove contaminated groundwater and vapors moving through the soil into homes will proceed. This system will allow for the treatment of contamination in place. Areas which presently have minor amounts of contamination will be allowed to naturally heal. This process is called “natural attenuation” which means the bacteria in the soil and groundwater will breakdown the chemicals and make them harmless. It may take 20 or more years for the contamination to be removed or treated to more acceptable levels.