

Frequently Asked Questions: Planters Oil Mill Site

Question: What is a brownfield?

Answer: The EPA defines a brownfield as *a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant*". In other words, a brownfield is a property that has been abandoned because it is or *just might be* contaminated.

Q: What is Planters Oil Mill?

A: The former Planters Oil Mill (POM) property is currently a field bounded by Cokey Road to the East, Branch Street to the West, Short Street to the North and the CSX railroad (after which runs Norfolk Street) to the South. (the lot is adjacent to the former telephone company at 1004 Cokey Road). It is about 7.8 acres and for decades it housed a fertilizer and cottonseed oil factory by the same name. Due to the materials and chemicals that went into the production process in this factory, once it fell into disuse after a violent fire in 1983, the site was classified as a "brownfield."

Q: What contaminants are found at the POM site?

A: The contaminants found in the soil at the POM site are mostly polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and arsenic.

Q: Are the contaminants dangerous?

A: Whether a compound is dangerous or not is depends on two factors: the toxicity of the compound and the dose to which people are exposed. (Even taking in an excess of water, for example, can be harmful.)

At high levels or low-level exposure for a long time, some of these contaminants may be hazardous to health.

Q: Where can I find more information on these contaminants and possible health risks?

A: You can find more information in the Tox FAQs for [PAHs](#) and [arsenic](#) at the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry website.

- PAHs: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=121&tid=25>
- Arsenic: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=19&tid=3>

Q: What has been done about it?

A: Approximately 4.5 acres of the site have been remediated through a process that involves covering the contaminated area with clean soil at a depth of 1 foot. This process keeps contaminants in place and prevents them from spreading as long as the cap of soil is monitored and maintained.

The un-remediated portion of the site may require further remediation once funds are available for redevelopment, depending on the redevelopment plan for the site. As part of this plan, the area may be covered by impervious surface such as a parking lot or foundation, or other allowed surface to prevent exposure to soil contamination.

Q: What are the ways that a person could be exposed to contaminants at the Planter's Oil Mill site?

A: The main routes of exposure for contaminants in the soil are by breathing contaminated dust from the air or by direct contact with soil. Children that play in contaminated soil may put their hands in their mouths and unintentionally eat contaminated soil.

Q: Is there some kind of plume of contaminants moving through the soil or groundwater?

A: No, there is no "plume" of contamination that we know of. The PAH chemicals at the site do not move around easily in soil, and they are not quick to evaporate. Arsenic is a metal that occurs naturally in soil, and may dissolve in water, depending on its form. The potential for exposure from groundwater at the site does not exist because there is no drinking water well on the site.

(You can think of the problem of volatility like cooking oil vs alcohol. The chemicals at this site are more structurally similar to oil than they are to volatile chemicals such as alcohol. When alcohol is on a surface, it easily evaporates and produces a strong odor. In contrast, when oil is on a surface, it does not move or evaporate unless you disturb the surface.)

Q: I heard there used to be underground tanks at the site. Were they removed?

A: Of the six tanks that were registered by the former owner of the site, we know that two largest tanks (one with fuel oil and the other with hexane, capacity 10,000 gallons) were removed and disposed of during the remediation process in 2011. We also know several thousand gallons of product, water and contaminated sludge were also removed from those tanks during that time. However, there are also four 1,000-gallon tanks known at the site. Two of those tanks are empty diesel storage tanks and two are kerosene tanks that contain 200-400 gallons of “residual fluid.” As far as we know, these tanks are still buried at the site.

Q: Will my child get sick if (s)he runs across the site playing flag football?

A: This is unlikely. A child would have to have very high levels of exposure, either through eating the soil breathing in excessive amounts of dust, in order to experience a short-term illness. What we are concerned with is long-term, low-level exposure for kids or pregnant women, since the chemicals found at the site can affect development if there is long-term exposure.

Q: What can I tell my child about the POM site?

A: It is best to keep off the site to limit any possible exposure to contaminated soil until the site has been fully remediated. If children do use the site, make sure they keep their hands away from their mouth, nose and face, and wash their hands thoroughly after playing in the area.