



Beltsville Agricultural Research Center BARC 31 and 32: PCB Cleanup

December 2009

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) completed a cleanup of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination in the soil at two sites: a maintenance yard (BARC 32) and a former equipment storage area (BARC 31) at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC). PCBs are heat transfer fluids associated with old electric transformers that have some hazardous properties. Transformers containing these fluids stored at these two sites in the past had evidently leaked PCB-containing fluids into the surrounding soil. Past activities at these sites have also resulted in soil contaminated with other environmental pollutants, including certain pesticides, metals, and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These contaminants were also included in the soil clean up.

To determine the extent of PCB contamination, samples from materials stored at both sites as well as samples from surface and subsurface soil and shallow groundwater were collected and analyzed.

To keep the contamination confined, ARS decided, in consultation with EPA, to complete a Time Critical Removal Action at the active and occupied BARC 32 shops area, and a Non-Time Critical Removal Action (NTCRA) at the inactive and unoccupied BARC 31 former storage area. Both removal actions were designed to address the high concentrations of PCBs found in soil at the sites.

Completed Removal Actions

Comprehensive Work Plans were prepared to guide the soil removal actions at each site. Erosion control measures were taken, and Health and Safety Plans were developed to ensure that operations were conducted safely.

The Time Critical Removal Action at BARC 32 was conducted in the spring and summer of 2004. The Non-Time Critical Removal Action at the adjacent BARC 31 site was performed in the spring and summer of 2006. Depending on PCB and/or pesticide, metal, or PAH concentrations, excavated soil and debris from both sites went either to an approved thermal treatment (recycling) facility in Virginia, a Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)-permitted landfill in Michigan, or to a non-hazardous waste landfill in Virginia.

Sensitive soil analyses were performed on site to guide excavation activities. When the excavations were complete, additional soil samples were collected to confirm that restored areas met established cleanup goals.

Approximately 15,000 tons of soil with PCBs and other contaminants (i.e., pesticides, heavy metals, and PAHs) were excavated from both sites. At the conclusion of the cleanups, excavations were backfilled with clean soil. Landscaping, grading, and re-seeding activities have now returned each site to productive use.

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Community Relations

Community relations activities for both sites were conducted within the framework of BARC's facility-wide Community Relations Plan. There remains a mailing list for interested individuals and organizations, an "Information Repository" for public access to information about the removal process, and public meetings are periodically held.

For More Information...

Contact Kim Kaplan, ARS Information Staff, at 301-504-1637, by e-mail at Kim.Kaplan@ars.usda.gov, or visit the ARS Information Repository located in Room 014, Building 003, 10300 Baltimore Avenue, Beltsville, MD. The Information Repository is open to the public Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm. The Information Repository is also available at the Prince George's County Memorial Library at 4319 Sellman Road. The library's hours of operation are Monday through Wednesday, 10 am to 9 pm; Thursday and Friday, 10 am to 6 pm; and Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm.