

Former Ascham Street Works Garden Contamination Investigation

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- Explanation of legal documents
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If you have not received all of the above documents please contact the Environmental Health Team.

How to Contact Us

You can telephone us on **020 7974 2638** between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm Monday to Friday. Outside of these hours please leave a message on the answer phone.

You can fax us on **020 7974 6955**.

If you want to e-mail us please send your e-mail to env.health@camden.gov.uk

Our address is:
London Borough of Camden
Environmental Health Team
Town Hall
Argyle Street
London
WC1H 8EQ

If you would like to speak with somebody about the findings of the study and the information contained in this pack please use the telephone number above. If you would like to meet with an officer you can make an appointment during office hours. If this is not convenient we will try to make an arrangement to meet you at your house outside our normal working hours.

Part A - General Information

- **What substances have been found?**
- **Advice on using your garden**
- **What happens now?**

What substances have been found?

Many of the substances that have been found in your garden are found naturally in soils and are essential for normal health in small quantities. Many of the contaminants are also commonly found in soil in urban gardens. However, those found in your garden are generally higher than normal levels.

The risk assessment of land is based on a theoretical risk that someone's health *might* be harmed, *if* they have been exposed to the soil. Even if land has been found to have raised levels of chemicals and has been declared contaminated, this does not necessarily mean that people living on that land have actually taken the chemicals into their bodies. It does mean that the risk needs to be taken seriously and investigated and that the right action needs to be taken to deal with the contamination.

Information provided by Camden Primary Care Trust previously sent to residents gave advice relating to health issues associated with the contaminants found in the gardens tested. If you have not received a copy of this and would like one please contact Darren Beesley on 020 7974 2638 and a copy can be sent to you.

The substances that affect your garden are listed in the Notification Document in Part B of this information Pack. Although the majority of gardens in the Kentish Town site are contaminated, not all of the gardens are contaminated with the same contaminants. Therefore, not all these chemicals will be relevant to everyone. A summary of the key messages from the health information sheet sent to residents earlier this year is given below.

Lead

Lead is a naturally occurring metal that is used in old paint and found as a result of burning of fossil fuels. Lead gets into our bodies through swallowing and breathing it in. Just touching lead is not a problem. Young children are more at risk from the effects of lead because:

- they are more likely to be exposed e.g. playing in the garden, putting soil in their mouths and being less good at washing their hands, and
- their bodies are still developing and are more affected by the lead

Long term exposure to lead if it gets into the body in a big enough amount can cause problems with the nervous system, gut, kidneys and blood.

Arsenic

Arsenic in our environment can come from natural sources (e.g. mineral rocks) or from man-made sources. Arsenic gets into our bodies through swallowing and breathing it in. Touching arsenic is not a significant risk. The man-made sources include industry e.g. electronics manufacturing, commercial products e.g. wood preservatives, cigarettes and in minute concentrations in food e.g. wine and seafood.

Long-term exposure to arsenic can cause problems with the nervous system, skin and digestive system and can cause cancer.

Cadmium

Cadmium is a naturally occurring metal and is used in batteries and metal coating. It is also found in our food and in cigarette smoke. Cadmium can get into our bodies if we swallow it or breathe it in. Just touching cadmium is not a problem.

Exposure over many years may cause damage to kidneys, lungs and blood and can make bones more brittle than usual.

Chromium

Chromium is a naturally occurring element found in rocks, soil and in the air. Chromium is also an essential nutrient that our bodies need. Chromium can get into our bodies if we swallow, breathe or touch it. Chromium is present in the environment in several different chemical forms and how it affects your health will depend on which form it is in.

Exposure over many years to the worst type of chromium (known as hexavalent chromium) may cause an increased risk of respiratory cancers.

Nickel

Nickel is widespread in the natural environment. It is found in small amounts in the food we eat. Nickel usually gets into our bodies by breathing it in.

Exposure to Nickel over many years may cause respiratory problems, allergic reactions and can cause cancer.

Mercury

Mercury is a naturally occurring metal with several different chemical forms. It can be breathed, swallowed, or absorbed through the skin. Common sources include food (especially fish and shellfish), in the home (thermometers & barometers) and industries that burn mercury-containing products.

Exposure over many years may cause effects to the nervous system and kidney damage.

PAH's

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's) are a group of contaminants do not occur naturally. They are products of burning fossil fuels. Many different substances make up the group of chemicals known as PAH's. The main sources for PAH's are vehicle emissions and cigarette smoking. Exposure over many years has been associated with respiratory problems, blood disorders and some cancers.

IS THERE A HEALTH RISK?

Just because there is contamination in soil, it does not mean that the chemicals will get into your body and affect your health. Taking into account all the things we know so far about the soil on this site we believe it is unlikely that the chemicals in the soil have caused any health problems. Provided you follow the advice in the 'Advice on Using Your Garden' leaflet provided there are no immediate health risks. It should be noted that the exposure effects listed above could also be symptoms of many other medical conditions.

This leaflet has been prepared with assistance from Camden Primary Care Trust and the Health Protection Agency. If you are concerned about your health please see your GP. All GPs in Camden have been made aware of the current investigation at Ascham Street.

Advice on using your garden

Until steps have been taken to deal with the contamination in your garden please continue to follow our previous advice.

We have listed a number of Do's and Don'ts for you to bear in mind whilst using your garden over the coming months:

DO

Enjoy your garden

Sit out in your garden

Wear gloves when gardening

Follow normal hygiene precautions and wash your hands thoroughly after working in the garden and before handling food

Use pots and growbags with fresh soil to grow fruit or vegetables

Talk to us before having any building works done in the garden

Tell potential purchasers/tenants about the contaminated land issue

DON'T

Eat produce grown in your garden soil

Let children play with soil and put it in their mouths

Carry out any major digging in the garden without taking advice first

Buy any new flowers, shrubs or trees because we may need to remove them to carry out clean-up works

Dig holes for any building works, e.g. fence posts or building foundations

If you have any specific queries about what you can and what you shouldn't do in your garden then please contact the Environmental Health Team on 020 79742638 Monday – Friday between 9.00am and 5.00pm.

What happens now?

The Council has been working with Camden Primary Care Trust and the Health Protection Agency and. We are in agreement that the concentrations of some metals and other contaminants are higher than they should be for garden soils.

The Government has set out guidelines for local authorities to follow when dealing with contaminated sites. There are certain key steps that we must follow and complete before we are able to deal with the contamination in your garden.

Stage One – Letting you know what we have found

We have sent you a detailed information pack explaining what we have found in your garden. Part of this information pack includes detailed legal documentation relating to the soil results from your garden. A clear summary of this information has also been provided for your information. We have met with a number of residents already and are happy to meet more of you, so that you can ask questions or raise concerns you have with officers working on the project.

Stage Two – Deciding what needs to be done

Once the information packs have been sent to all residents and any other interested people, we will begin talking with people about the best way to remove any potential risks to health – in accordance with the Government guidance. We will be talking with you, the former occupiers of the industrial site, the Nursing Home Management, the Environment Agency and the Government Department responsible for contaminated land. We will seek specialist advice and we will keep in close contact with you to find out what you think about any proposed plans.

Stage Three – Deciding who pays for any works

At the same time we are deciding what needs to be done, the Council is required to consider who will pay for any required clean up works. There are a number of rules laid down by the Government as to how we go about this. The principle aim of the legislation is that local authorities like Camden are responsible for identifying who has caused the contamination and if this can be confirmed, ensuring that those people are required to pay. If the Council enters into an agreement with the company that formally occupied the site and agrees an apportionment of the costs, then it is the Council that will fund the portion of costs not paid for by them. We will keep in close contact with you whilst this is being investigated.

Stage Four – Remediation/Clean Up

Once the best option for removing the risk has been identified and agreed upon, clean up works will be completed. It is possible that the clean up proposals will involve the removal of contaminated topsoil, which will be replaced with clean imported topsoil and reinstatement of gardens. This will be the final stage in the process.

Timescales

We know that this issue has been going on for too long already. We will proceed as quickly as possible to complete the process, having regard to the need to follow legal procedures and subsequently implement any necessary works.