

# Dirt Alert - Lead & Arsenic In The Soil

**Public Health—Seattle & King County is no longer offering the Dirt Alert program. King County residents can contact the Washington State Department of Ecology for information about the program.**

## Where did arsenic and lead come from?

The former ASARCO copper smelter in Ruston, WA operated for almost 100 years. The smelter's smokestack released arsenic, lead, and other metals throughout the Puget Sound region. These pollutants settled into the upper layers of the dirt and remain there today. We call this area the Tacoma Smelter Plume.

We found that the closer the area is to the old smelter, the more likely it is to be polluted. However, we also found that activities such as landscaping and land development usually lower the level of arsenic and lead by mixing it with cleaner dirt.

## Am I in an affected area?

Visit Ecology's map, where you can search your address to see if you are in the Tacoma Smelter Plume. [Click Here](#)

## What are you doing about the Tacoma Smelter Plume?

Soil Safety Program - Ecology is cleaning up places where children play, such as schools, childcares, parks, and camps. [Click Here](#)

Dirt Alert education and outreach. Please contact Ecology (below) for free videos, curriculums, brochures, and other materials.

Ecology is working on a long-term cleanup plan. This plan includes soil sampling and cleanup for parts of Vashon-Maury Island, which is one of the most contaminated areas of the plume. Please contact Ecology (below) to join the mailing list, so we can let you know when the plan is available for public comment.



## What does this mean for my health?

The elevated levels of arsenic and lead in most areas of King County do not pose an immediate health threat. There is concern about possible health effects if your family is in constant contact with contaminated dirt over a long period of time.

Arsenic is known to cause cancer, and lead has been linked to developmental disabilities. Exposure to arsenic and lead occurs when they are eaten or inhaled. Skin contact with arsenic and lead is not considered an exposure to be concerned about.

Anyone can be at risk, but children under the age of 6 are at greater risk of health effects over their lifetime. Why? Kids put hands and objects in their mouths. Children are also smaller in size, which means they take in chemicals in greater concentrations than adults.

The good news is that by following some Healthy Actions you can help protect your family from chemicals found in dirt. [Click Here](#)

## Is it safe to garden?

You can take healthy actions like wearing gloves and washing your hands after gardening. Ecology also recommends building raised gardens. You can also test your soil (see below).

Some vegetables and fruits may take up small amounts of arsenic into their roots or leaves. However, there may be a greater risk from unwashed fruits and vegetables that have small amounts of contaminated soil. Wash fruits and vegetables before eating them. [Click here](#) for more information.

## How do I find out what's in my soil?

Ecology has brochures on how to sample your own soil and what to do once you have the results. [Click here](#) for the soil sampling brochure. [Click Here](#)

What to do after you sample your soil. [Click Here](#)

## Contacting Ecology

If you have questions or would like soil sampling brochures, please fill out your information here so Department of Ecology can respond to you. [Click Here](#)

Website: [http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites\\_brochure/tacoma\\_smelter/ts\\_hp.htm](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites_brochure/tacoma_smelter/ts_hp.htm)