Frequently Asked Questions: Dioxins in Soil at Trainsong Park and Adjoining Neighborhood

What areas of Trainsong Park in west Eugene remain temporarily closed?

The City of Eugene temporarily closed Trainsong Park on Jan. 13, 2022, after the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality unexpectedly identified dioxins in the park's soil. During February 2022 and February 2023, DEQ collected soil samples from several areas of the park for further analysis. The sample results revealed a few areas in the southeast portion of the park have elevated levels of dioxins and will need to be cleaned up to protect public health. Those areas remain closed until further notice. Other parts of the park are open, including the skatepark, ballfield, and playground.

Where did the dioxins contamination come from at and around Trainsong Park?

Currently, DEQ does not know what caused the dioxins contamination at Trainsong Park or the adjoining neighborhood. And based on data collected, the source of the contamination may never be determined. The initial soil sampling, during fall of 2021, was part of an area background study completed during the investigation for the J.H. Baxter facility in west Eugene. The park was not likely contaminated by Baxter because of its distance from the facility, which is nearly a mile away. Also, the sample data indicate another source is likely. DEQ used funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to sample the soil at and near the park as a separate investigation from the ongoing Baxter cleanup.

What areas of Trainsong Park were included in the most recent soil sample collection?

DEQ divided the park into separate decision units for the sample collection process. Officials defined the decision units based on their level of use by park visitors and their potential exposure to shallow soils. DEQ did not include paved surfaces – such as the skatepark and basketball courts – in the soil sampling because of the surface cover and limited possibility of contact with soil. The City of Eugene added approximately four inches of fresh sand and bark chips to the play areas of the park.

In addition, DEQ collected soil samples at eight residential properties near the park. Results showed that dioxins were intermittently present and in a few cases were moderately elevated. The distribution of dioxins detections appears unclear, and the source of contamination not known. Based on findings, the park does not appear to be the cause of the dioxins found in the neighborhood.

Will the soil at Trainsong Park be sampled further?

DEQ has collected enough samples from the park to determine the magnitude and extent of contamination and is not planning any further work. The results indicate that elevated dioxins contamination is limited to the southeast area of the park itself and does not appear that to have migrated into the neighborhood. DEQ and the City of Eugene are working closely so the City can develop a plan to address the contamination in the park. DEQ and the City are also discussing options, including possible clean up, needed to open all areas of the park.

Why are dioxins a concern in the first place?

Dioxins are a class of toxic chemicals produced by industrial and natural sources. Depending on the level of exposure, dioxins can increase the risk of cancer and the risk of other health effects to people.

According to OHA, people are exposed to soil in parks less often than they are exposed to soil from their own yards, because they typically spend more time at home than they do in a park. OHA plans to evaluate DEQ's soil sampling data from the park to find out the level of health risks to past and present park users. OHA will publish their findings in a report that community members can review and comment on before it is finalized. OHA plans to do this work in 2024. In the meantime, OHA encourages park users to pay attention to the signs at the park and stay out of areas that have been cordoned off.

I live near Trainsong Park, will DEQ come and sample my soil?

DEQ does not currently have plans or funding to complete further sampling in the neighborhood near Trainsong Park. Property owners however may opt to pay for their own soil sampling but sampling for dioxins can be costly and should be done by a professional environmental firm.

Contacts

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Last updated: Oct. 17, 2023