

# U.S. EPA to Conduct Soil Tests in Southeast Chicago

**Watco Terminal Site**  
Chicago, Illinois

May 2019

## For more information

For questions, comments or for more information, you can contact these U.S. EPA team members:

*For soil sampling access agreements:*

### **Heriberto León**

Community Involvement  
Coordinator

[leon.heriberto@epa.gov](mailto:leon.heriberto@epa.gov)

312-886-6163

*For soil sampling technical questions:*

### **Kristina Miller**

On-Scene Coordinator

[Miller.kristina@epa.gov](mailto:Miller.kristina@epa.gov)

312-353-1057

*For air monitoring information:*

### **Patrick Miller**

Air Enforcement Division

[miller.patrick@epa.gov](mailto:miller.patrick@epa.gov)

312-886-4044

U.S. EPA Region 5

77 W. Jackson Blvd.

Chicago, Illinois 60604

### **EPA toll-free:**

800-621-8431, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., weekdays

*For health questions, contact*

### **Michelle Colledge, MPH, Ph.D.**

CAPT, U.S. Public Health Service  
Agency for Toxic Substances and

Disease Registry/NCEH/CDC

[colledge.michelle@epa.gov](mailto:colledge.michelle@epa.gov)

312-886-1462

## **Website:**

<https://www.epa.gov/il/watco-terminal-and-port-services>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is starting to collect soil samples near the Watco Terminal and Port Services facility in Southeast Chicago to analyze them for manganese and other metals. The targeted sampling area is roughly between East 126<sup>th</sup> Place to the north and East 127<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> streets to the south, South Torrence and South Muskegon avenues to the east and South Carondelet Avenue to the west (*see map back*). The sampling will help U.S. EPA identify if manganese is present in soil at concentrations that exceed the U.S. EPA removal management level (RML). If concentrations exceed the RML for manganese, U.S. EPA will then evaluate to determine if a removal action is necessary to protect public health at those properties.

## **Property owners wanted**

U.S. EPA is contacting homeowners to request permission to sample their yards. Property owners who sign the voluntary access agreement give permission to the federal Agency to collect soil samples on their property. U.S. EPA will sample properties at no cost to owners and will restore the ground after the sampling is completed. U.S. EPA staff will contact owners to schedule the sampling and answer any questions. Residents do not need to be present for the sampling.

Property owners may turn in their access agreement by June 15 to U.S. EPA:

- By email to [leon.heriberto@epa.gov](mailto:leon.heriberto@epa.gov); or
- By USPS mail to Heriberto Leon, EPA Region 5 (SE-6J), 77 West Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604. (EPA's business reply envelope requires no postage and may be used for this purpose.)

Experts from the federal Agency, along with its health partners, will evaluate the results to determine whether manganese in soil poses an unacceptable health risk to residents and whether any follow-up action is required. Property owners will receive a copy of the sampling results once the lab data has been validated.

## **Background**

U.S. EPA has been studying air in Chicago's Southeast side since 2013 in response to residents' concerns about the area's long industrial history.<sup>1</sup> U.S. EPA has inspected Watco several times since June 2014. On May 15, 2018, U.S. EPA issued an information request to Watco requiring the company to install and operate an ambient (surrounding) air monitor to measure breathable particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) and metals, including manganese. (*continued on back....*)

<sup>1</sup> An Aug. 7, 2017, U.S. EPA Notice of Violation was issued under Section 113(a)(1) of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. § 7413(a)(1). U.S. EPA found that Watco was violating the Illinois State Implementation Plan at its Chicago facility.

In December 2018, U.S. EPA issued a Notice of Violation under the Clean Air Act to Watco. The federal Agency determined manganese emissions exceeded the health-based screening level. Air monitoring data from Sept. 17 through Oct. 31, 2018, showed an average concentration of 0.416 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) of manganese. The minimal risk level for chronic inhalation exposure to manganese is  $0.3 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . Since December 2018, there has been a decrease in manganese emissions around the facility to far below the minimal risk level. On Feb. 22, 2019, Watco announced that its Chicago facility will cease receiving and handling manganese-bearing bulk materials. Watco is still required to conduct filter-based ambient air monitoring for  $\text{PM}_{10}$  and metals, including manganese, pursuant to EPA's May 15, 2018, information request.

U.S. EPA continues to evaluate all monitoring data and operational information submitted by Watco to determine what additional measures must be taken to ensure the health of residents of Southeast Chicago. U.S. EPA is committed to sharing the air monitoring data that is available at the following website:  
<https://www.epa.gov/il/watco-terminal-and-port-services>.



*Taking a soil sample is a simple and routine process. This investigator is seen using a hand auger to dig a small hole in the soil that can be collected for laboratory analysis.*

Manganese is a naturally occurring element found in many soils, rocks and foods, and is used in the production of steel and other industrial processes.

Manganese can be toxic when inhaled by humans at elevated exposure levels, leading to neurological and neuropsychological damage.



*Target area for residential soil sampling near the Watco facility in Chicago's Hegewisch neighborhood.*