

# NPL Site Narrative for Ralph Gray Trucking Co.

## RALPH GRAY TRUCKING CO. Westminster, California

**Conditions at Proposal (July 29, 1991):** The Ralph Gray Trucking Co. site is in a 23-acre residential area near the intersection of Sowell Avenue and Golden West Street, north of the San Diego Freeway in Westminster, Orange County, California. The site was originally proposed under the name "Westminster Tract #2633."

From the 1930s through the 1950s, portions of the site were used for disposal of sulfuric acid sludge and oil refinery wastes in unlined surface impoundments. Investigations subsequent to proposal indicate that Ralph Gray Trucking Co. transported the waste materials to the impoundments, which the company owned and operated. In 1936, the company and its owner were convicted in the Justice Court of Huntington Beach Township for maintaining a public nuisance at the site.

During the late 1950s, Hintz Development Corp. purchased the site to develop a housing tract. When development began, a "tar sump" containing wastes once stored on-site was discovered. Hintz Development excavated the wastes and placed them into three unlined redisposal trenches also located on-site.

After the tract had been built, residents living in houses near the suspected locations of the redisposal trenches complained of black tar-like seeps in backyards, foul odors, and damage to fences, lawns, and patios due to unusual settling of the ground surface. In 1986, a resident reported that a black tarry material was oozing through cracks from the sides of her pool. The waste material is apparently gradually moving upward through the soil column from the redisposal trenches, especially at higher temperatures. Additionally, construction of the houses has disturbed the soils underlying the site, further encouraging the upward movement of the wastes.

Investigations conducted by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (CDTSC) in 1986-87 revealed extensive contamination at the site. CDTSC determined that the waste seeps and some soil samples contained various organic compounds, including benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene, fluorene, naphthalene, and phenanthrene, as well as low levels of lead. The seeps were highly acidic (pH 1.8 to 2.1).

Ground water beneath the site is as shallow as 7 feet below ground surface. Toluene and ethylbenzene have been detected in ground water collected from this upper aquifer. A lower aquifer is approximately 130 feet below ground surface. Possible interconnection between the two aquifers is not known. Within 4 miles of the site, the lower aquifer provides drinking water to an estimated 67,600 people. The closest well is less than one-quarter mile from the site. During 1987-91, CDTSC excavated materials seeping to the surface in the backyards of several residences. In February 1990, CDTSC completed a Phase I Remedial Investigation, further characterizing the extent of wastes in the three redisposal trenches.

EPA investigated the site in 1989. The investigation included interpretation of historical photographs of the facility and sampling of wastes, soil, ground water, surface water, and air. EPA verified that the waste

seeps are migrating to the surface from the redisposal trenches, and that soils are contaminated with lead (apparently from dumping of gasoline) and various organic chemicals. In addition, contaminant migration into a nearby flood control channel was photographically documented.

Seal Beach Natural Wildlife Refuge, within 4 miles of the site, includes wetlands and is an important habitat for two endangered species. Commercial fishing occurs in the Pacific Ocean within 10 miles of the refuge.

**Status (October 1992):** In October 1991, EPA started a search to identify parties potentially responsible for wastes associated with the site and will solicit the participation of those identified in cleaning up the site.

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at [ATSDR - ToxFAQs](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.