

# NPL Site Narrative for Wurtsmith Air Force Base

## WURTSMITH AIR FORCE BASE Iosco County, Michigan

Wurtsmith Air Force Base is located in the northeastern part of Michigan's lower peninsula, about 2 miles west of Lake Huron in Iosco County. The facility is bordered to the north and northeast by Van Etten Lake, on the northwest by Au Sable State Forest, on the west and south by forested wetlands, on the southwest by Allen Lake, and on the southeast and east by the Village of Oscoda. Wurtsmith covers 5,223 acres, 1,943 acres of which are owned by the U.S. Air Force. The rest of the facility consists of 2,466 acres; most of which are leased primarily from the state, and 814 acres are registered as easement tracts.

Wurtsmith has been in operation under different names and with different capacities since 1923. The facility began as a subsidiary of Selfridge Field and was named Camp Skeel. Until World War II, Camp Skeel was used for gunnery practice, winter maneuvers, and aircraft landings. The base was renamed Oscoda Army Air Field and was operated by the Continental Air Command as a transient aircraft stopover. In 1953, the base was renamed Wurtsmith Air Force Base when it came under the command of the U.S. Air Force Strategic Air Command. According to the Emergency War Order, the primary mission of the base was to maintain full readiness to conduct strategic bombing operations worldwide. Support activities at Wurtsmith include aircraft and vehicle maintenance, training of bombardment crews and units, and air refueling support. Wurtsmith was closed in June 1993.

In 1985, an Installation Restoration Program Phase I records search for Wurtsmith identified 29 sources of concern. Five sources have been evaluated based upon the availability of data and documented releases: Building 43 Area, Building 5008 Area, the Northern Landfill Area, the Weapons Storage Area, and two 6,000-gallon tank trailers.

The 500-gallon underground storage tank in the Building 43 Area was used from 1962 to 1977 to store waste trichloroethylene (TCE). After the tank was removed, a leak was discovered near the filler pipe on the top of the tank. In November 1977, the Air Force collected eight ground water samples; TCE was detected in three of the seven drinking water wells on base. Additional samples collected in 1979 and 1980 also detected TCE.

TCE was used as a degreaser for the maintenance of fire control equipment in the Building 5008 Area. Solvents, including TCE, were apparently dumped near buildings in this area for weed control. TCE was found in monitoring wells near Building 5008. Water-supply pumping of drinking water wells drew contaminants toward these wells. Samples collected from the drinking water wells in 1977 revealed TCE contamination.

The Northern Landfill Area was used from 1960 to 1979 to dispose domestic and industrial wastes. Industrial wastes deposited in the landfills included solvents, metals, and paints.

During the 1950s and early 1960s the Weapons Storage Area was used as a jet fighter maintenance area. TCE was used onsite and may have been used for degreasing and deicing operations. The U.S.

Geological Survey (USGS) identified a TCE-contaminated ground water plume that appeared to be emanating from this area.

In 1971, two 6,000-gallon tank trailers were buried in the center of the Northern Landfill Area. The tanks were buried to create a central depository for waste solvents. In 1987, the USGS sampled monitoring wells downgradient of the landfill and identified TCE, 1,1-dichloroethane, 1,1,1-trichloroethane, and vinyl chloride.

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.