



Preventing Exposure to PCBs in the Ten Mile/Lange/Revere Canals

Ten Mile Drain Superfund Site
St. Clair Shores, MI

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Contact information

For questions, comments or for more information, you can contact:

Ten Mile Drain Superfund Site

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Canal dredging permits

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Health questions related to PCB exposure

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

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Macomb County Health Department

586-469-5236

You may call EPA toll-free at 800-621-8431, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., weekdays

Websites

www.epa.gov/superfund/ten-mile-drain

www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is investigating the PCB-contamination in the Ten Mile Drain system in St. Clair Shores. Many years ago, PCBs were released into the environment and are still found in our lakes, soil and air. PCBs are in the sediment (mud) of the Ten Mile/Lange/Revere canals and the drain discharging to the canals. PCBs have also been found in fish sampled from the Ten Mile/Lange/Revere canals.

What are PCBs?

Polychlorinated biphenyls, better known as PCBs, were used widely as coolants and lubricants in transformers and other electrical equipment. Manufacturing of PCBs stopped in 1977 because it became known that they build up in the environment and are slow to break down. PCBs stick to organic materials such as soil and sediment in a waterbody. They do not break down when heated and do not dissolve in water.

Can PCBs harm my health?

Brief contact with PCBs is not a problem for most people. Studies of people who worked with PCBs have found links to cancers of the liver, biliary tract (the duct connecting the liver and gall bladder), intestines and skin. Skin conditions such as acne and rashes are sometimes seen in workers who have contact with PCBs. PCB exposure in the general public is not likely to result in skin and liver effects. Studies suggest that children born to mothers who eat Great Lakes fish, which can contain high levels of PCBs, may have behavioral or learning difficulties.

Is there a medical test to show whether I've been exposed to PCBs?

Tests exist to measure levels of PCBs in your blood, body fat, or breast milk, but these are not routine tests. Most people already have low levels of PCBs in their body because nearly everyone has been exposed to PCBs in the environment. The tests can show if your PCB levels are higher than the general public. But the test cannot show when or how long you were exposed, what the source of PCBs was, or whether you will develop health issues.

How are people potentially exposed to PCBs at the Ten-Mile Drain Superfund site?

The most likely way for people to be exposed to PCBs from the canals is by eating fish or other food caught from the canals. When swallowed, PCBs get absorbed into the blood and tissues and stay there for many years. Less likely ways to be exposed to PCBs include breathing air containing PCBs, and touching or swallowing soil, sediment or canal water containing PCBs.

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- ✓ **Air:** During the 2002 cleanup of the PCB-contaminated sediment in the canals, the EPA tested the air in the area. Very low levels of PCBs were occasionally found in the air, but the levels were not harmful to human health. The amount of PCBs in the canals now is much less than during the cleanup in 2002 and would not be expected to enter the air at harmful levels.

- ✓ **Soil:** During the ongoing environmental investigation, EPA has taken steps to prevent the public from coming into contact with soil that may be contaminated. Touching soil with small amounts of PCBs is unlikely to cause health harm. Dense grass or a clean layer of topsoil can prevent contact with contamination that might be in underlying soils. As with any outdoor activity, wash your hands after playing in the yard or working in the garden, take your shoes off before going inside to avoid bringing soil inside, and discourage children from eating dirt and putting dirty hands or toys in their mouths.

- ✓ **Sediment:** People may be exposed to PCB-contaminated sediment if they go into the canals to work on their boat slips or docks or for any other reason. However, infrequent contact with contaminated sediment is not expected to cause harm.

- ✓ **Water:** PCBs tend to stick to sediment rather than float in the water, so the amount of PCBs would be much lower in the water. Avoid activities such as boating at high speeds that are likely to stir up and move sediment throughout the canal. Exposure to PCBs while swimming would not be expected to cause harm. As a general health and safety measure, it is recommended you swim at beaches or recreational areas where water quality is monitored and where lifeguards are on duty.

Can I eat fish I catch in the Ten Mile/Lange/Revere Canals? Can I touch fish (catch and release)?

At this time, we advise that people do not eat fish from the Lange and Revere street canals. Fish from these canals have been tested for PCBs. The amount of PCBs in the fish is far higher than the amount that is safe for people.

The amount of contaminated water you may get on your skin when handling fish would not be harmful. For more information about eating fish from Lake St. Clair or the St. Clair Shores area, please go to www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish and refer to the Southeast Michigan Guide.

Should canal water be used in my yard?

It is recommended that you do not use water from the canals for watering your yard, rinsing off produce, or gardening until the contaminated sediment is removed. Until the cleanup is completed, pumping water from the canals may disturb sediment contaminated with PCBs and move them to your yard.

What about other canals?

Dredging permits require that sediment be tested to make sure they are disposed of properly. Testing results have not shown levels of concern in other canals.

EPA is proposing to clean up PCB-contaminated soil at residential and commercial properties. Will EPA test my property for PCBs?

The proposed residential cleanup involves properties in Investigation Area 1 around Lakeland and Bon Brae streets and Harper Avenue and Investigation Area 2 centered on the Lange and Revere streets canals. If your property is selected to be tested or cleaned up, EPA will contact you to request access.

Is my property eligible for cleanup?

Cleanup eligibility at a property is based on the PCB level found:

Residential properties with more than 1 part per million (ppm) of PCBs in soil.

Commercial properties with more than 10 ppm of PCBs in soil.

Right-of-way/Utility Corridor properties with more than 21 ppm of PCBs in soil.