

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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ENVIRONMENTAL TESTS FIND NO SIGNS OF OFFSITE CONTAMINATION FROM EQ FIRE MEDIA AVAILABILITY SCHEDULED AT 1:30 pm TODAY

RALEIGH – State environmental and public health officials today announced that environmental testing near the EQ Apex facility has found no offsite contamination as a result of October's fire. The testing, which was conducted in late October, was designed to look for heavy metals and other signs of contamination from the fire at the hazardous waste facility.

Apex Mayor Keith Weatherly said he was pleased that the state conducted the testing and happy to reassure residents that the fire had not affected nearby property. "It is so very gratifying to now be assured by the testing just completed that the hazardous materials were not spread across the Apex community, but instead are confined to the fire scene, and are now being safely contained, removed and disposed of elsewhere," he said.

The tests were completed at sites upwind and downwind of the fire. If offsite contamination had occurred as a result of the fire, then areas downwind from the fire would be likely to show a pattern of contamination with chemicals that were found in ashes on the EQ site. There was no such pattern. The ashes on the fire site primarily contain barium, cadmium, chromium and lead. Those particular chemicals were not found in unusual concentrations offsite, and there was no difference between tests conducted upwind and downwind of the fire.

"What we were looking for was any indication that homes or businesses might have been contaminated with heavy metals or other chemicals from the fire that could present a health risk to Apex citizens," said Robin Smith, assistant secretary for the environment at the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. "We didn't find that. We found the kind of thing you would find at low levels in any urban area."

State Epidemiologist Dr. Jeff Engel agreed. "Results from this sampling survey revealed no significant or widespread contamination associated from the fire at the EQ facility," he said. "While the fire may have caused some short-term respiratory problems, particularly for first responders, luckily its contamination has been contained to the facility site."

Inspectors took samples on exterior structure walls. Analysis of the exterior wipe samples showed that concentrations of all the tested pollutants were well below levels at which adverse health effects would be observed in the general population. Test results indicated no discernible pattern of metals deposition that might have correlated to wind-borne contamination from the EQ fire. The wipe tests detected background levels of various compounds both upwind and downwind of the fire and on both sides of the tested structures.

Both soil and exterior wipe tests didn't show high levels of any of the chemicals that have been found in ashes at the EQ site. Soil sample analyses indicated the presence of a number of metals – including arsenic, mercury, manganese and silver – widely distributed across the entire area sampled, both upwind and downwind of the fire. All of these metals were detected in concentrations within the stated EPA "naturally occurring" range. Soil testing did find three arsenic "hotspots," associated with identifiable arsenic sources (treated wood decks and an auto maintenance facility). Studies finding that arsenic leaches out of treated wood and can contaminate nearby soil led EPA to ban this particular kind of wood treatment in 2003. The levels detected are consistent with the levels seen in areas that have been treated with agricultural pesticides.

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Some Apex residents had been particularly concerned about mercury contamination, because an outside consultant reportedly found elevated levels of mercury at one location. DHHS sampled for mercury and no elevated levels were found. Interior sampling found one house with higher than normal lead levels. The house is an older house and it is likely that lead-based paint, which is common in older homes, is the source.

NOTE: ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH OFFICIALS WILL HOLD A MEDIA AVAILABILITY REGARDING THIS REPORT AT 1:30 TODAY IN ROOM 264 OF THE ADAMS BUILDING ON THE DOROTHEA DIX CAMPUS.
DIRECTIONS:

From downtown: Exit the downtown area on Dawson Street. Just after you pass the area around the convention center, more into the far right lane. Look for the Western Blvd/Martin Luther King Blvd. exit. Bear to the right and go on to Western Blvd. to the second light on Western. You will go under a railroad bridge and turn left at this light. This will be Hunt Drive. Hunt Dr ends at a stop sign, turn right on to Umstead Dr. Go to the second building on the left and park in front. This is the Adams Building.

East from Cary on I-40/440: Take the Lake Wheeler exit (the Farmer's Market exit). At the light, turn left toward the Farmers' Market. At the second light, turn left on to Centennial Parkway. Go to the third light on Centennial and turn right on to Blair Dr. Come up Blair Dr. through a stop sign. Go through stop sign and park in front of the building on your left. This is the Adams Building.

West from downeast/Wilson on I-40/440: Take the Lake Wheeler exit (the Farmer's Market exit). At the light, turn right toward the Farmers' Market. At the second light, turn left on to Centennial Parkway. Go to the third light on Centennial and turn right on to Blair Dr. Come up Blair Dr. through a stop sign. Go through stop sign and park in front of the building on your left. This is the Adams Building.

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