

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Contamination investigation in Solomontown, Port Pirie

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The EPA is today doorknocking about 100 homes in Solomontown after testing found potentially hazardous chemicals that may be related to historical activities at an old gasworks site.

Soil vapour tests were conducted through December and January, which found elevated levels of chemicals underground in road verges and footpaths. These chemicals have the potential to migrate through the soil and into homes.

After consultation with SA Health, the EPA has determined that precautionary vapour testing is required in homes.

The chemicals found were those typically associated with old gasworks activities and include benzene, total petroleum hydrocarbons, naphthalene and ammonia. These chemicals can present a risk to human health if they migrate into, and build up within, the air within houses. The Department of Health has advised that, if present at elevated levels, the chemicals are only likely to pose a risk to human health over many years of exposure.

EPA Chief Executive Helen Fulcher said a team of EPA staff is in Solomontown today to doorknock residents to explain what has been found, what further testing is needed, and to seek consent to test in homes.

"There is no evidence that homes are affected, and we are conducting this testing to rule out any impacts on residents," Ms Fulcher said.

The site has been known to be contaminated since 2004 and a groundwater exclusion zone was declared in 2006. Residents have previously been advised of the groundwater in the area is highly saline and it is unlikely that it was being used for domestic purposes.

The EPA has been testing at this site as part of investigations into former high-risk activities, such as gasworks, for historic contamination. This follows the EPA in July 2009 being given greater powers to investigate site contamination.

Testing in homes is expected to begin later this month.

The former South Australian Gas Company (SAGASCO) gasworks operated from 1892 to 1965. Historic gasworks activities are known to have produced waste materials containing various volatile chemical substances including ammonia, naphthalene, benzene and other hydrocarbon based materials (for example toluene, xylene, ethylbenzene, isopropyl-benzene) that have the potential to present a risk to human health over long periods of exposure.