

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Improving access to site contamination information

The Environment Protection Authority will improve public access to records it holds about site contamination with a new online index service available from noon today.

EPA Chief Executive, Helen Fulcher, said the index of actual or potential groundwater site contamination notifications was the first step in a planned roll-out of online services to improve access to information held by the EPA.

“The index will provide the South Australian community with online access that will allow them to search by suburb and find out whether there have been any notifications of possible groundwater contamination in their area,” Ms Fulcher said.

“Residents who want to know about a site in their area can then contact the EPA for further information and arrange to speak with an EPA site contamination officer if they wish.

“The sites listed on the index arise from notifications that have been received by the EPA as a result of the government’s new contamination provisions that require site owners and operators to advise us of any known contamination.

“Very soon after being appointed Minister for Environment and Conservation, Paul Caica met with the EPA Board and requested that we examine the operation of our public register of documents to make it easier for the community to access public information.

“The EPA has been working towards providing more information online, and with recent community interest in site contamination, it was timely to make groundwater notifications the first index of this type on our website.”

“In addition to information on the website, we will begin placing advertisements in local newspapers to keep the community informed of new notifications.”

A statement outlining the EPA’s approach to communicating on site contamination is now available on the EPA website.

The groundwater notifications date from 1 July 2009 when amendments to the Environment Protection Act 1993 made it a legal requirement for actual or potential groundwater contamination to be reported to the EPA. It is the responsibility of original polluters or current site owners – who may not have caused the contamination – to manage the site. The EPA regulates and oversees this system.

“At the time of notification, there may be little information available about the extent and nature of the contamination and whether it poses any risk to the public. More assessment and testing may be needed and this process can sometimes take several years. If at any stage the EPA becomes aware of a possible risk to public health or the environment, it ensures affected communities are notified,” Ms Fulcher said.

The site contamination groundwater notifications index does not replace direct communication with affected communities, but is an additional service to provide a greater level of knowledge about the records that the EPA holds.

The index will be updated monthly, with new notifications added when they are received.

Further information will be progressively made accessible via the EPA website, with future indexes to include site contamination audit reports and EPA licences.

To access the new groundwater index go to www.epa.sa.gov.au and click on the “Public Register Directory” button on the home page.