

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Review to consider site contamination management reforms in SA

The management of historic site-contamination issues in South Australia will be reviewed by a Committee established by the Board of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to identify how investigations into contamination and communication with residents and other landholders can be improved.

Presiding Member of the EPA Board Mia Handshin says the review will use recent site-contamination issues at Clovelly Park and Mitchell Park as a case study to capture learnings and ensure continuous improvement in the management of site contamination.

“Careless industrial practices of the past have left a legacy of contamination in parts of SA. Our generation is the first to do something about it.

“This review will assess the effectiveness of the system currently in place and make recommendations for reform including protocols and practices to reflect the community’s changing expectations about the communication of site contamination matters,” Ms Handshin said.

The review will be led by Victorian EPA Chair Cheryl Batagol – an expert in bringing restorative justice to those affected by environment protection issues.

The Committee, made up of experts in science, public health, environmental law and senior state government officials, will consider the roles and responsibilities of the EPA and government agencies, inter-agency cooperation as well as the prioritisation of work on sites posing potential health risks.

EPA Chief Executive Tony Circelli welcomed the review noting that provisions for managing and responding to site contamination have now been in place for five years.

Mr Circelli said: “The EPA is continuing to investigate historic contamination in former and existing industrial sites and we want to ensure South Australians have complete confidence in the work we are doing.

“The EPA’s principal role is to ensure that responsible parties meet their obligations. The Environment Protection Act adopts the polluter pays principle which means that, where possible, the party who caused the contamination is responsible for the assessment, management, containment and/or clean-up of the site,” he added.

The EPA is continuing to re-examine sites with known groundwater contamination and reviewing when the affected communities were last advised about the use of groundwater.

Residents, landowners and businesses in areas where a groundwater notification has previously been issued are reminded not to use bore water for any purpose.

“One of our greatest challenges is how we translate complex science into easily understood information about health risks without sparking unwarranted fear in the community.

“In most circumstances a small change in behaviour such as not using bore water is enough to protect residents,” he said.

Mr Circelli said the EPA would continue to ensure that residents, businesses and other relevant stakeholders received clear and timely information about any testing in their area.

The EPA website provides information on all current areas under investigation and is a useful resource for the community on the nature and possible impacts of historic site contamination, particularly in relation to groundwater.

Since 2009, the EPA has received approximately 520 notifications relating to groundwater contamination in South Australia and has undertaken public communication notices for approximately 330 of those sites.

“Dealing with site contamination is something that regulators throughout the world are continually developing and relying on better and improved science and standards,” Mr Circelli said.

Mr Circelli said the EPA was a leader in Australia in applying new science and technology to soil and groundwater testing, particularly in the emerging area of soil-vapour testing.

“Our expertise is an essential asset to ensure we continue to address the challenge of managing these sites into the future. While recognising the many successful outcomes achieved by the EPA, I am committed to an organisation that listens, learns and adapts,” he said.

A report detailing key findings and recommendations is expected by February 2015. It will be submitted to the Minister for Environment for the consideration and response of the South Australian Government and will be published on the EPA’s website.