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EPA Begins Soil Sampling of Black Leaf Chemical Neighbors

by ERICA PETERSON on FEBRUARY 15, 2012



Environmental Protection Agency employees are continuing an effort today to test soil in the city's Park Hill neighborhood. They want to determine if [pesticides in the abandoned Black Leaf Chemical site have contaminated nearby yards](#).

[Black Leaf Chemical](#) was a pesticide-manufacturing facility that operated on a 29-acre site in Park Hill from 1930 to 1970. Up until at least the 1950s, it made pesticides like DDT and Dieldrin.

Now, federal and state regulators have evidence that pesticides and heavy metals migrated past the site's perimeters into nearby alleys. They're testing more than 50 nearby yards to find out if they're contaminated, too.

Art Smith is an EPA On-Scene Coordinator based in Louisville. He says his team is looking for signs of pesticides, arsenic and lead in more than 50 nearby yards.

"The concern for contamination in people's yards, the levels would be, they don't have to be that high before they could be a concern for people being exposed on a regular basis over an extended period of time," he said.

In a house off of St. Louis Avenue, environmental scientist Don Hunter digs into the yard with a hand auger.

“We don’t want to collect too much sample, too much depth, because if we do, any contamination that might be present in the first couple of inches is going to be diluted out by the uncontaminated soil,” he said.

He drops the soil into a glass baking dish and repeats the process in four different areas of the yard. Then it’s mixed up and distributed between two jars. That’s the soil that will go to the lab for testing.

Art Smith says the results won’t be in for six to eight weeks. If the federal government discovers enough evidence of pesticides or heavy metals on private property, it could mean entire yards will be excavated, then filled in with fresh dirt.