



# PUBLIC HEALTH STATEMENT

## Naphthalene, 1-Methylnaphthalene, and 2-Methylnaphthalene

CAS#: 91-20-3, 90-12-0 and 91-57-6

Division of Toxicology

August 2005

This Public Health Statement is the summary chapter from the Toxicological Profile for Naphthalene, 1-Methylnaphthalene, and 2-Methylnaphthalene. It is one in a series of Public Health Statements about hazardous substances and their health effects. A shorter version, the ToxFAQs™, is also available. This information is important because this substance may harm you. The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits, and whether other chemicals are present. For more information, call the ATSDR Information Center at 1-888-422-8737.

This public health statement tells you about naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene and the effects of exposure to these chemicals.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) identifies the most serious hazardous waste sites in the nation. These sites are then placed on the National Priorities List (NPL) and are targeted for long-term federal clean-up activities. Naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene have been found in at least 654, 36, and 412, respectively, of the 1,662 current or former NPL sites. Although the total number of NPL sites evaluated for these substances is not known, the possibility exists that the number of sites at which naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene are found may increase in the future as more sites are evaluated. This information is important because these sites may be sources of exposure and exposure to these substances may harm you.

When a substance is released either from a large area, such as an industrial plant, or from a container, such as a drum or bottle, it enters the environment. Such a release does not always lead to exposure. You can be exposed to a substance only when you come in contact with it. You may be exposed by breathing, eating, or drinking the substance, or by skin contact.

If you are exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene, many factors will determine whether you will be harmed. These factors include the dose (how much), the duration (how long), and how you come in contact with them. You must also consider any other chemicals you are exposed to and your age, sex, diet, family traits, lifestyle, and state of health.

### 1.1 WHAT ARE NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE?

Naphthalene is a white solid that evaporates easily. It is also called mothballs, moth flakes, white tar, and tar camphor. When mixed with air, naphthalene vapors easily burn. Fossil fuels, such as petroleum and coal, naturally contain naphthalene. Burning tobacco or wood produces naphthalene. The major commercial use of naphthalene is to make other chemicals used in making polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastics. The major consumer products made from naphthalene are moth repellents, in the form of mothballs or crystals, and toilet deodorant blocks. It is also used for making dyes, resins, leather tanning agents, and the insecticide carbaryl.

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Naphthalene has a strong but not unpleasant smell. Its taste is unknown, but it must not be unpleasant since children have eaten mothballs and deodorant blocks. You can smell naphthalene in the air at a concentration of 84 parts naphthalene per one billion parts (ppb) of air. You can smell it in water when 21 ppb are present.

1-Methylnaphthalene is a naphthalene-related compound that is also called alpha methyl-naphthalene. It is a clear liquid. Its taste and odor have not been described, but you can smell it in water when only 7.5 ppb are present.

Another naphthalene-related compound, 2-methylnaphthalene, is also called beta methylnaphthalene. It is a solid like naphthalene. The taste and odor of 2-methylnaphthalene have not been described. Its presence can be detected at a concentration of 10 ppb in air and 10 ppb in water.

1-Methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene are used to make other chemicals such as dyes, and resins. 2-Methylnaphthalene is also used to make vitamin K. All three chemicals are present in cigarette smoke, wood smoke, tar, asphalt, and at some hazardous waste sites.

### 1.2 WHAT HAPPENS TO NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE WHEN THEY ENTER THE ENVIRONMENT?

Naphthalene enters the environment from industrial uses, from its use as a moth repellent, from the burning of wood or tobacco, and from accidental spills. Naphthalene at hazardous waste sites and landfills can dissolve in water and be present in

drinking water. Naphthalene can become weakly attached to soil or pass through the soil particles into underground water.

Most of the naphthalene entering the environment is from the burning of woods and fossil fuels in the home. The second greatest release of naphthalene is through the use of moth repellents. Only about 10% of the naphthalene entering the environment is from coal production and distillation. Less than 1% of the naphthalene released to the atmosphere can be attributed to the losses from naphthalene production. Cigarette smoking also releases small amounts of naphthalene into the air.

Naphthalene evaporates easily. That is why you can smell mothballs. In the air, moisture and sunlight make it break down, often within 1 day. Naphthalene can change to 1-naphthol or 2-naphthol. These chemicals have some of the toxic properties of naphthalene. Some naphthalene will dissolve in water in rivers, lakes, or wells. Naphthalene in water is destroyed by bacteria or evaporates into the air. Most naphthalene will be gone from water in rivers or lakes within 2 weeks.

Naphthalene binds weakly to soils and sediments. It easily passes through sandy soils to reach underground water. In soil, some microorganisms break down naphthalene. When near the surface of the soil, naphthalene will evaporate into air. Microorganisms present in the soil will break down most of the naphthalene in 1–3 months.

Naphthalene does not accumulate in the flesh of animals and fish that you might eat. If dairy cows are exposed to naphthalene, some naphthalene will be in their milk; if laying hens are exposed, some naphthalene will be in their eggs. Naphthalene and

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the methylnaphthalenes have been found in very small amounts in some samples of fish and shellfish from polluted waters.

Scientists know very little about what happens to 1-methylnaphthalene and 2-methylnaphthalene in the environment. These compounds are similar to naphthalene and should act like it in air, water, or soil.

### 1.3 HOW MIGHT I BE EXPOSED TO NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYL-NAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYL-NAPHTHALENE?

You are most likely to be exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene from the air. Outdoor air contains low amounts of these chemicals. Burning of wood or fossil fuels and industrial discharges adds these chemicals to the environment. Automobile exhaust contributes naphthalene among other chemicals to air pollution in the cities. Typical air concentrations for naphthalene are low, 0.2 ppb or less. Studies of outdoor air reported concentrations of 0.09 ppb 1-methylnaphthalene and 0.011 ppb 2-methylnaphthalene. In homes or businesses where cigarettes are smoked, wood is burned, or moth repellents are used, the levels of naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene in the air are higher. Studies of indoor air typically report that average indoor air concentrations of these contaminants are less than 1 ppb.

You are not likely to be exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene by eating foods or drinking beverages. These materials are unlikely to come in contact with naphthalene or

methylnaphthalenes during production or processing. Naphthalene and the methylnaphthalenes are also unlikely to be present in tap water.

If you live near a hazardous waste site and have a well used for drinking water, you might be exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene. For this to happen, the chemicals must pass through the soil and dissolve in the underground water that supplies your well. Children might also contact these chemicals by playing in or eating the dirt near a waste site.

Work using or making moth repellents, coal tar products, dyes, or inks could expose you to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene in the air. Working in the wood-preserving, leather tanning, or asphalt industries could expose you to naphthalene.

Using moth repellents containing naphthalene in your home will expose you to naphthalene vapors. Your skin can come in contact with naphthalene via the use of naphthalene-treated clothing, blankets, or coverlets. You can breathe in the naphthalene vapors that are present in clothes and linen stored with moth-balls. Smoke from cigarettes can also expose you to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene. The highest airborne naphthalene concentrations in indoor air occur in the homes of cigarette smokers.

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### 1.4 HOW CAN NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE ENTER AND LEAVE MY BODY?

Naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene can enter your body if you breathe air that contains these chemicals, if you smoke, if you eat mothballs, if you drink water that contains these chemicals, or if they touch your skin. These chemicals are most likely to enter your body through the air you breathe into your lungs. Naphthalene can also enter your body through your skin when you handle mothballs, particularly if you have used an oil-based skin lotion. You can also breathe in naphthalene vapors from clothes that have been stored in mothballs.

Once naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene enter your body, small amounts will dissolve in your blood. Your blood carries them to your liver and other organs. These organs change them so that they pass through your body, mainly into your urine. Some naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene, and their breakdown products can be present in your stool. Naphthalene also has been found in some samples of fatty tissue and breast milk taken from the general U.S. population, but the concentrations of naphthalene were low. Most naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene that enters your body is expected to leave quickly within 1–3 days.

### 1.5 HOW CAN NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE AFFECT MY HEALTH?

Scientists use many tests to protect the public from harmful effects of toxic chemicals and to find ways for treating persons who have been harmed.

One way to learn whether a chemical will harm people is to determine how the body absorbs, uses, and releases the chemical. For some chemicals, animal testing may be necessary. Animal testing may also help identify health effects such as cancer or birth defects. Without laboratory animals, scientists would lose a basic method for getting information needed to make wise decisions that protect public health. Scientists have the responsibility to treat research animals with care and compassion. Scientists must comply with strict animal care guidelines because laws today protect the welfare of research animals.

Exposure to a large amount of naphthalene may damage or destroy some of your red blood cells. This could cause you to have too few red blood cells until your body replaces the destroyed cells. This problem is called hemolytic anemia. People, particularly children, have developed this problem after eating naphthalene-containing mothballs or deodorant blocks. Anemia has also occurred in infants wearing diapers that have been stored in mothballs. If your ancestors were from Africa or Mediterranean countries, naphthalene may be more dangerous to you than to people of other origins. These populations have a higher incidence of problems with an enzyme that usually protects red blood cells from damage created by oxygen in the air.

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Some of the symptoms that occur with hemolytic anemia are fatigue, lack of appetite, restlessness, and a pale appearance to your skin. Exposure to a large amount of naphthalene, such as by eating mothballs, may cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, blood in the urine, and a yellow color to the skin. If you have these symptoms, you should see a doctor quickly.

Anemia is a common condition in pregnancy that can be due to causes other than naphthalene exposure. However, if you are a pregnant woman and are anemic due to naphthalene exposure, then it is possible that your unborn child may be anemic as well. Naphthalene can move from your blood to your baby's blood. Once your baby is born, naphthalene may also be carried from your body to your baby's body through your milk. It is not completely clear if naphthalene causes reproductive effects in animals; most evidence says that it does not.

Laboratory rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, and rats sometimes develop cataracts (cloudiness) in their eyes after swallowing naphthalene at high dose levels. It is not certain whether cataracts also develop in humans exposed to naphthalene, but the possibility exists.

When mice or rats breathed in naphthalene vapors daily throughout their lives (2 years), cells in the lining of their noses or lungs were damaged. Some exposed female mice also developed lung tumors. Some exposed male and female rats developed nose tumors. When mice or rats were fed naphthalene in their food for 13 weeks, no tumors or other tissue changes were found. The only effect found was

decreased body weight in rats that were fed naphthalene.

Based on these results from animal studies, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services concluded that naphthalene is reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) concluded that naphthalene is possibly carcinogenic to humans, because there is enough evidence that naphthalene causes cancer in animals, but not enough evidence about such an effect in humans. Under the EPA 1986 cancer guidelines, naphthalene was assigned to Group C – possible human carcinogen.

When mice were fed food containing 1-methylnaphthalene or 2-methylnaphthalene for most of their lives (81 weeks), the gas-exchange part of the lungs of some mice became filled with an abnormal material. This type of lung injury is called pulmonary alveolar proteinosis. A few mice also had lung tumors, but the numbers of mice with lung tumors were not enough to conclude that 1-methylnaphthalene or 2-methylnaphthalene caused the tumors. Pulmonary alveolar proteinosis has been seen in some people, but the cause of this uncommon lung disease in humans is unknown.

### 1.6 HOW CAN NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE AFFECT CHILDREN?

This section discusses potential health effects in humans from exposures during the period from conception to maturity at 18 years of age.

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Hospitals have reported many cases of hemolytic anemia in children, including newborns and infants, who either ate naphthalene mothballs or deodorant cakes or who were in close contact with clothing or blankets stored in naphthalene mothballs.

Newborns or infants are thought to be especially susceptible to this effect on the blood, because their bodies are less able to get rid of naphthalene than adults.

Newborn mice appear to be more susceptible to lung injury than adult mice, when they are injected with naphthalene. These results suggest that children may be more susceptible to lung injury from naphthalene than adults. Scientists do not know if lung injury from breathing in naphthalene in childhood may lead to lung disease later in life.

There are no reports that prenatal or postnatal exposure to naphthalene has caused developmental problems in human offspring. When pregnant mice, rats, or rabbits were fed naphthalene during their pregnancy, the development of their offspring was normal. Normal offspring development occurred even when the amounts of naphthalene given were large enough to prevent the pregnant animals from gaining their normal amount of weight.

There are no studies in humans or animals indicating whether or not children are more susceptible to health effects from 1-methylnaphthalene or 2-methylnaphthalene.

### 1.7 HOW CAN FAMILIES REDUCE THE RISK OF EXPOSURE TO NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE?

If your doctor finds that you have been exposed to substantial amounts of naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene, ask whether your children might also have been exposed. Your doctor might need to ask your state health department to investigate.

The most important way that families can reduce the risk of exposure to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene is to avoid smoking tobacco, generating smoke during cooking, or using fireplaces or heating appliances in their homes. If families use naphthalene-containing moth repellants, the material should be enclosed in containers that prevent vapors from escaping. The containers should not be accessible to young children. Blankets and clothing stored with naphthalene moth repellents should be aired outdoors to remove naphthalene odors and washed before they are used. To further minimize the risk of exposure to naphthalene, families should inform themselves of the contents of air deodorizers that are used in their homes, and refrain from using deodorizers with naphthalene.

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### 1.8 IS THERE A MEDICAL TEST TO DETERMINE WHETHER I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO NAPHTHALENE, 1-METHYLNAPHTHALENE, AND 2-METHYLNAPHTHALENE?

Several tests determine whether you have been exposed to naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene. These tests include measuring naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, 2-methylnaphthalene, or their breakdown products in samples of urine, stool, blood, maternal milk, or body fat. These tests require special equipment, which is not routinely available in a doctor's office. Body fluids, urine, stool samples, or tissue samples can be sent to a special laboratory for the tests. These tests cannot determine exactly how much naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene you were exposed to or predict whether harmful effects will occur. If the samples are collected within a day or two of exposure, then the tests can show if you were exposed to a large or small amount of naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, or 2-methylnaphthalene.

### 1.9 WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS HAS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MADE TO PROTECT HUMAN HEALTH?

The federal government develops regulations and recommendations to protect public health. Regulations *can* be enforced by law. The EPA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are some federal agencies that develop regulations for toxic substances. Recommendations provide valuable guidelines to protect public health, but *cannot* be enforced by law. The Agency for

Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) are two federal organizations that develop recommendations for toxic substances.

Regulations and recommendations can be expressed as “not-to-exceed” levels, that is, levels of a toxic substance in air, water, soil, or food that do not exceed a critical value that is usually based on levels that affect animals; they are then adjusted to levels that will help protect humans. Sometimes these not-to-exceed levels differ among federal organizations because they used different exposure times (an 8-hour workday or a 24-hour day), different animal studies, or other factors.

Recommendations and regulations are also updated periodically as more information becomes available. For the most current information, check with the federal agency or organization that provides it. Some regulations and recommendations for naphthalene, 1-methylnaphthalene, and 2-methylnaphthalene include the following:

The federal government has developed regulations and advisories to protect individuals from the possible health effects of naphthalene in the environment. OSHA set a limit of 10 parts per million (ppm) for the level of naphthalene in workplace air over an 8-hour workday. NIOSH set a limit of 500 ppm for the level of naphthalene in workplace air expected to be immediately dangerous to life or health. Exposure to workplace air concentrations above this limit for more than 30 minutes would be expected to impair a worker's ability to escape the contaminated workplace.

EPA recommends that children not drink water with over 0.5 ppm naphthalene for more than 10 days or

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over 0.4 ppm for any longer than 7 years. Adults should not drink water with more than 1 ppm for more than 7 years. For water consumed over a lifetime (70 years), EPA suggests that it contain no more than 0.1 ppm naphthalene.

Industrial releases of naphthalene into the environment of more than 100 pounds must be reported to EPA.

There are no regulations or advisories for 1-methylnaphthalene or 2-methylnaphthalene.

### 1.10 WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any more questions or concerns, please contact your community or state health or environmental quality department, your regional Nuclear Regulatory Commission office, or contact ATSDR at the address and phone number below.

ATSDR can also tell you the location of occupational and environmental health clinics. These clinics specialize in recognizing, evaluating, and treating illnesses resulting from exposure to hazardous substances.

Toxicological profiles are also available on-line at [www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov) and on CD-ROM. You may request a copy of the ATSDR ToxProfiles CD-ROM by calling the information and technical assistance toll-free number at 1-888-42ATSDR (1-888-422-8737), by email at [atsdric@cdc.gov](mailto:atsdric@cdc.gov), or by writing to:

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry  
Division of Toxicology  
1600 Clifton Road NE  
Mailstop F-32  
Atlanta, GA 30333  
Fax: 1-770-488-4178

For-profit organizations may request a copy of final profiles from the following:

National Technical Information Service (NTIS)  
5285 Port Royal Road  
Springfield, VA 22161  
Phone: 1-800-553-6847 or 1-703-605-6000  
Web site: <http://www.ntis.gov/>

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