



# Activities in the Virgin Islands



## ATSDR in Partnership With the Virgin Islands

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is the lead public health agency responsible for implementing the health-related provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA). ATSDR is an Atlanta-based federal agency with more than 400 employees and a budget for 2004 of approximately \$73 million. ATSDR assesses the presence and nature of health hazards at specific Superfund sites, helps to prevent or reduce further exposure and illnesses resulting from those hazards, and expands the knowledge base about the health effects of exposure to hazardous substances.

## ATSDR Site-Specific Activities

### Public Health Assessment-Related Activities

One of ATSDR's important mandates is to conduct **public health assessments** of all National Priorities List (NPL) sites and of other sites where a significant threat to public health might exist. A public health assessment is a written, comprehensive evaluation of available data and information about the release of hazardous substances into the environment in a specific geographic area. Such releases are assessed for past, current, or future impact on public health. ATSDR, in collaboration with public health and environmental officials from the **Virgin Islands**, has conducted public health assessments at **three** sites in the territory:

- Bovoni Dump, St. Thomas, St. Thomas (final document released 1/9/1998)
- Island Chemical Corporation, Christiansted, St. Croix (final document released 5/19/1998)
- Tutu Wellfield, St. Thomas, St. Thomas (final document released 5/14/1996).

A **health consultation** is a written or oral response from ATSDR to a specific request for information

about health risks related to a specific site, chemical release, or hazardous material. A health consultation is a more limited response than a public health assessment. In the **Virgin Islands**, **seven** health consultations have been conducted at **six** sites in the Virgin Islands:

- Anguilla Landfill/DPW, Christiansted, St. Croix (final document released 11/8/1999)
- Bovoni Dump, St. Thomas, St. Thomas (final document released 12/23/1999)
- Island Chemical Corporation/Virgin Island Chemical Company, Christiansted, St. Croix (final documents released 5/25/1989 and 7/6/1989)
- Monroe and Sibilly Elementary School, St. Thomas, St. Thomas (final document released 5/01/2000)
- Susannaberg Landfill, St. John, St. John (final document released 5/15/1992)
- Virgin Islands (nonsite-specific) (final document released 7/12/1990).

Following is an example of a health consultation conducted by ATSDR in the Virgin Islands.

- **Monroe and Sibilly Elementary School**—Congressional Delegate Donna M. Christensen (D-VI) asked ATSDR to evaluate drinking water cisterns contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the **Monroe and Sibilly Elementary School, St. Thomas**. ATSDR was asked to determine (1) whether the contamination found in the cisterns could be responsible for upset stomachs and rashes in students at the school, and (2) whether the contamination in the water came from the Tutu Wellfield site.

*ATSDR has conducted three public health assessments and seven health consultations in the Virgin Islands.*

ATSDR conducted a health consultation that addressed Delegate Christensen's request. In the health consultation, ATSDR concluded that the concentrations of VOCs or total trihalomethanes detected in the cisterns would not cause upset stomachs or rashes.

The health consultation released in May 2000 explains how ATSDR determined that the contaminated water found in the drinking water cisterns at the school did not come from the Tutu Wellfield site. To ensure that the drinking water at the school does not contain any contamination at levels of concern in the future, ATSDR recommended that authorities in the Virgin Islands conduct regular monitoring of the school's drinking water supply in accordance with the Virgin Islands Territorial Safe Drinking Water Act.

In August 2004, at Delegate Christensen's request, ATSDR met with residents in **St. Croix** and **St. Thomas**. At the St. Croix meeting, residents reported health concerns they have about the nearby Hovensa petrochemical plant and the former St. Croix Alumina Plant. At this time, no specific ATSDR activities are planned for St. Croix; however, Delegate Christensen expects some follow-up from the agency's Office of Environmental Justice with the **Virgin Islands Department of Health**, the community health center, and members of the community.

At the St. Thomas meeting, residents voiced their health concerns about the nearby Bovoni landfill. ATSDR plans to return to St. Thomas to participate in community health education seminars offered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. ATSDR has also started discussions with the health department for potentially educating local physicians and nurses in the environmental arena (e.g., information on taking an exposure history and on contaminants at the Bovoni site). In addition, ATSDR staff will evaluate the public health significance of any air data that become available for areas surrounding the Bovoni Landfill.

### Health Education and Community Activities

As part of its ongoing outreach activities in affected communities, ATSDR proactively involves communities in identifying their health concerns

and developing actions to address them. Through a national cooperative agreement with the Migrant Clinicians Network, ATSDR provides assistance to health care providers working with migrant and seasonal farm workers. The Migrant Clinicians Network, the second largest clinical network in the United States, brings together clinicians from various professions to meet the needs of migrant and seasonal farm workers. Nine health care organizations in the **Virgin Islands** are members of the Migrant Clinicians Network.

### Resource Materials

ATSDR develops materials for public health professionals and medical care providers to use to assess the public health impacts of chemical exposures. These resources are available in print, on the ATSDR Web site, and on CD-ROM. For example, medical management guidelines are available for acute chemical exposures to more than 50 chemicals. These guidelines were designed to aid emergency department physicians and other emergency health care professionals, such as first responders, who manage acute exposures resulting from chemical incidents. ATSDR's toxicological profiles comprehensively describe health effects; pathways of human exposure; and the behavior of more than 250 hazardous substances in air, soil, and water at hazardous waste sites. Health professionals at all levels use the toxicological profiles primarily as comprehensive resources. These profiles have been sent to requesters, including representatives of federal, state, and local health and environmental departments; academic institutions; private industries; and nonprofit organizations in the **Virgin Islands**. ATSDR also has developed extensive resources for community members.

*For more information, contact ATSDR toll-free at 1-888-42ATSDR (1-888-422-8737) or visit the ATSDR Web site at [www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov).*