



# Activities in Vermont



## ATSDR in Partnership With Vermont

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 an annual budget for 2003 of approximately \$82 million. ATSDR is responsible for assessing the presence and nature of health hazards at specific Superfund sites, helping to prevent or reduce further exposure and illnesses resulting from those hazards, and expanding the knowledge base about the health effects of exposure to hazardous substances.

ATSDR works closely with state agencies to carry out its mission of preventing exposure to contaminants at hazardous waste sites and preventing adverse health effects. ATSDR provides funding and technical assistance to states and other partners through cooperative agreements and grants to identify and evaluate environmental health threats to communities. These resources enable state and local health departments to further investigate environmental health concerns and to educate communities. In addition to direct funds and services, ATSDR provides technical and administrative guidance for state-conducted site activities.

## ATSDR Site-Specific Activities

### Public Health Assessment-Related Activities

One of the agency'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. **Eleven** sites in **Vermont** have been designated to the NPL.

A **public health assessment** is a written, comprehensive evaluation of available data and information on the release of hazardous substances into the environment in a specific geographic area. Such releases are assessed for current or future impact on public health.

ATSDR, in collaboration with public health and environmental officials from **Vermont**, has conducted health assessments at **11** sites in the state.

An example of a public health assessment conducted in **Vermont** follows:

*ATSDR has conducted 11 health assessments and 27 health consultations in the state of Vermont.*

**Pownal Tannery**—This site is a former cowhide and sheephide tanning and finishing operation in southwestern **Vermont** that operated from 1937 to 1988. Sampling data showed that the site was contaminated with heavy metals, dioxins, semivolatile organic compounds (SVOCs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

ATSDR conducted an initial site visit to the Pownal Tannery in December 1998. In May 1999, ATSDR conducted a follow-up visit to the site. This visit included community outreach and education activities and a reevaluation of site conditions. The initial public health assessment was released in September 1999. The site was categorized as a public health hazard because on-site dilapidated buildings posed physical hazards. ATSDR recommended further measures to restrict access to the site. Subsequently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) secured the area and initiated remediation. ATSDR also recommended additional sampling to better characterize the extent of on-site and off-site contamination in residential surface soils and drinking water wells. ATSDR also requested water, sediment, and biota sampling from the Hoosic River downstream from the site. EPA collected this additional information. In January 2001, ATSDR released the final public health assessment.

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. It is a more limited response than a public health assessment is. To date, 27 documented health consultations have been conducted in **Vermont**. Following is an example of a site at which several health consultations have been conducted:

**Pine Street Canal**—This site in **Burlington** consists of the Pine Street Canal, a turning basin, an adjacent wetland, an area formerly known as Maltex Pond, and an additional portion of land. A coal gasification plant operated at the site from 1908 until 1966. Plant wastewaters and residual oil and wood chips saturated with organic compounds associated with coal tar were discharged directly into, or disposed of into, the Pine Street Canal wetland. **Vermont** state officials detected high levels of these compounds at several locations. State public health officials were concerned that proposed highway construction would release the compounds into the canal and possibly into Lake Champlain, Burlington's drinking water source. ATSDR conducted a preliminary health assessment in 1988; health consultations in October 1991, August 1992, and October 1992; and two health consultations in July 1994. The health consultation in 1991 indicated *no health hazard*. The health consultations in 1992 indicated a *potential health hazard* due to coal tar exposure at the site and recommended that site access be restricted. ATSDR conducted the two consultations in 1994 on the general human health issues resulting from contaminants at the site and as a result of air sampling results in the area.

### Exposure Investigations

An **exposure investigation** collects information on specific human exposures through biologic sampling, personal monitoring, related environmental assessment, and exposure-dose reconstruction. Since 1994, ATSDR has conducted **one** exposure investigation in **Vermont**, as follows:

**Lakeside Community**—The purpose of this 2001 exposure investigation in the Lakeside community near **Burlington** was to measure VOCs in the community's air. The VOCs of specific interest were benzene, ethyl benzene,

toluene, and xylenes. ATSDR concluded that exposures in the community are not at levels expected to cause adverse health effects; therefore, the site does not pose a public health hazard. The site was categorized as *no apparent public health hazard* because exposure is still possible.

### CHER-CAP Exercise in Rutland

ATSDR Region I is working with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on an emergency preparedness mass-casualty field exercise called CHER-CAP. CHER-CAP is FEMA's Comprehensive HazMat Emergency Response-Capability Assessment Program. The exercise in **Rutland** is in the initial phase of planning. The actual field exercise is likely to occur by the end of 2003. Until that time, the local emergency planning agencies along with federal agencies (ATSDR, EPA, FEMA, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) are collaborating on training and planning programs.

### Resource Materials

ATSDR develops materials that public health professionals and medical care providers can use to assess the public health impacts of chemical exposures. 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 40 chemicals. 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. Since fiscal year 2002, more than **6,000** of 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 **Vermont**. ATSDR has also 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 page at [www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov).**