



## **CONTAMINATED LAND** **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is contaminated land?**

Contaminated land occurs when substances in, on or under the land are actually or potentially causing significant harm or polluting controlled waters. Such substances are likely to have arisen from past industrial activities. Contamination may not be visible to the naked eye but pollutants may still be present either at the surface or below ground level. Examples of pollutants include toxic substances such as arsenic and lead, and carcinogens such as hydrocarbons, phenols and asbestos.

### **What are the effects of contaminated land?**

Contaminated land can potentially pose a risk to human health and the environment. Human health effects may range from respiratory or skin irritation to increased frequency of cancer or birth defects. Environmental effects of contaminated land include pollution of groundwater, damage to buildings and destruction of flora and fauna. Some contamination may pose a risk of fire or explosion. The effects on human health and the environment will depend on the type and amount of contaminant involved.

### **How is contaminated land determined?**

Land can only be determined as 'contaminated' if a pollutant linkage is present. Such a linkage comprises a source (contamination), a pathway (means by which the contamination may move) and a suitable receptor (i.e. human). When all three are present, there is a significant possibility that harm may or will be caused.

### **If land is determined as contaminated, how is it restored?**

Contaminated land must be reinstated to a condition in which it is 'suitable for use' i.e. a pollutant linkage is not present. The future use of the land will determine how thorough the remediation or 'clean up' will be. For instance, if the proposed future use is to be industrial units, the target clean up levels will be less stringent than if the site is to be used as domestic gardens. It is likely that the planning process will clear up the majority of 'brownfield' sites.

### **Is it safe to live on or near contaminated land?**

As indicated above, contaminated land is only a potential problem if a pollutant linkage exists. Generally, the risks associated with living on sites that have been previously used by industrial practices are low. On the whole, it is more likely to affect the value of the property due to perceived risk rather than the actual effects posed to the health of occupiers or to the environment.

### **How can I find out about contaminated land in my area?**

Environmental Health services holds a public register listing sites that have been determined as contaminated land (as defined by Part IIa of the Environmental Protection Act 1990). The public register is available to view at Basildon Council, The Basildon Centre, St Martins Square, Basildon, Essex. Please note it is NOT a requirement of the Council to hold a register of land that *may* be contaminated.

### **How can I find out about potential contamination on or near to my property?**

Please see our separate leaflet entitled 'Contaminated Land Enquiry Factsheet' which is available to download from [www.basildon.gov.uk](http://www.basildon.gov.uk)