1.8 Contaminated Land

Applicability and Approach

This section provides a summary of management approaches for land contamination due to anthropogenic releases of hazardous materials, wastes, or oil, including naturally occurring substances. Releases of these materials may be the result of historic or current site activities, including, but not limited to, accidents during their handling and storage, or due to their poor management or disposal.

Land is considered contaminated when it contains hazardous materials or oil concentrations above background or naturally occurring levels.

Contaminated lands may involve surficial soils or subsurface soils that, through leaching and transport, may affect groundwater, surface water, and adjacent sites. Where subsurface contaminant sources include volatile substances, soil vapor may also become a transport and exposure medium, and create potential for contaminant infiltration of indoor air spaces of buildings.

Contaminated land is a concern because of:

- The potential risks to human health and ecology (e.g. risk of cancer or other human health effects, loss of ecology);
- The liability that it may pose to the polluter/business owners (e.g., cost of remediation, damage of business reputation and/or business-community relations) or affected parties (e.g. workers at the site, nearby property owners).

Contamination of land should be avoided by preventing or controlling the release of hazardous materials, hazardous wastes, or oil to the environment. When contamination of land is suspected or confirmed during any project phase, the cause of the uncontrolled release should be identified and corrected to avoid further releases and associated adverse impacts.

Contaminated lands should be managed to avoid the risk to human health and ecological receptors. The preferred strategy for land decontamination is to reduce the level of contamination at the site while preventing the human exposure to contamination.

To determine whether risk management actions are warranted, the following assessment approach should be applied to establish whether the three risk factors of 'Contaminants', 'Receptors', and 'Exposure Pathways' co-exist, or are likely to co-exist, at the project site under current or possible future land use:

- *Contaminant(s)*: Presence of hazardous materials, waste, or oil in any environmental media at potentially hazardous concentrations
- *Receptor(s)*: Actual or likely contact of humans, wildlife, plants, and other living organisms with the contaminants of concern
- *Exposure pathway(s)*: A combination of the route of migration of the contaminant from its point of release (e.g., leaching into potable groundwater) and exposure routes

(e.g., ingestion, transdermal absorption), which would allow receptor(s) to come into actual contact with contaminants

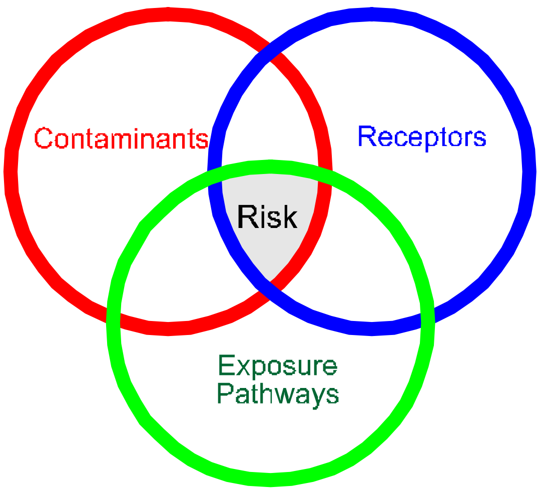

FIGURE 1.8.1: Inter-Relationship of Contaminant Risk Factors

When the three risk factors are considered to be present (in spite of limited data) under current or foreseeable future conditions, the following steps should be followed (as described in the remaining parts of this section):

1) Risk screening;
2) Interim risk management;
3) Detailed quantitative risk assessment; and
4) Permanent risk reduction measures.

Risk Screening

This step is also known as "problem formulation" for environmental risk assessment. Where there is potential evidence of contamination at a site, the following steps are recommended:

- Identification of the location of suspected highest level of contamination through a combination of visual and historical operational information;
- Sampling and testing of the contaminated media (soils or water) according to established technical methods applicable to suspected type of contaminant[57,58];
- Evaluation of the analytical results against the local and national contaminated sites regulations. In the absence of such regulations or environmental standards, other sources of risk-based standards or guidelines should be consulted to obtain comprehensive criteria for screening soil concentrations of pollutants.[59]
- Verification of the potential human and/or ecological receptors and exposure pathways relevant to the site in question

The outcome of risk-screening may reveal that there is no overlap between the three risk-factors as the contaminant levels identified are below those considered to pose a risk to human health or the environment. Alternatively, interim or permanent

[57] BC MOE. http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/contam_sites/guidance

[58] Massachusetts Department of Environment. http://www.mass.gov/dep/cleanup

[59] These may include the USEPA Region 3 Risk-Based Concentrations (RBCs). http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/risk/human/index.htm. These RBCs are considered acceptable for specific land use and contaminant exposure scenarios as they have been developed by governments using risk assessment techniques for use as general targets in the site remediation. Separate PRGs have been developed or adopted for soil, sediment or groundwater, and often a distinction is made between land uses (as noted earlier) because of the need for more stringent guidelines for residential and agricultural versus commercial/industrial landuse. The RBC Tables contains Reference Doses (RfDs) and Cancer Slope Factors (CSFs) for about 400 chemicals. These toxicity factors have been combined with "standard" exposure scenarios to calculate RBCs--chemical concentrations corresponding to fixed levels of risk (i.e., a Hazard Quotient (HQ) of 1, or lifetime cancer risk of 1E-6, whichever occurs at a lower concentration) in water, air, fish tissue, and soil for individual chemical substances. The primary use of RBCs is for chemical screening during baseline risk assessment (see EPA Regional Guidance EPA/903/R-93-001, "Selecting Exposure Routes and Contaminants of Concern by Risk-Based Screening"). Additional useful soil quality guidelines can also be obtained from Lijzen et al. 2001.

risk reduction measures may need to be taken with, or without, more detailed risk assessment activities, as described below.

Interim Risk Management

Interim risk management actions should be implemented at any phase of the project life cycle if the presence of land contamination poses an "imminent hazard", i.e., representing an immediate risk to human health and the environment if contamination were allowed to continue, even a short period of time. Examples of situations considered to involve imminent hazards include, but are not restricted to:

- Presence of an explosive atmosphere caused by contaminated land
- Accessible and excessive contamination for which short-term exposure and potency of contaminants could result in acute toxicity, irreversible long term effects, sensitization, or accumulation of persistent biocumulative and toxic substances
- Concentrations of pollutants at concentrations above the Risk Based Concentrations (RBCs[60]) or drinking water standards in potable water at the point of abstraction

Appropriate risk reduction should be implemented as soon as practicable to remove the condition posing the imminent hazard.

Detailed Risk Assessment

As an alternative to complying with numerical standards or preliminary remediation goals, and depending on local regulatory requirements, a detailed site-specific, environmental risk assessment may be used to develop strategies that yield acceptable health risks, while achieving low level contamination on-site. An assessment of contaminant risks needs to be considered in the context of current and future land use, and development scenarios (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial, and urban parkland or wilderness use).

A detailed quantitative risk assessment builds on risk screening (problem formulation). It involves first, a detailed site investigation to identify the scope of contamination.[61] Site investigation programs should apply quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) measures to ensure that data quality is adequate for the intended data use (e.g., method detection limits are below levels of concern). The site investigation in turn should be used to develop a *conceptual site model* of how and where contaminants exist, how they are transported, and where routes of exposure occur to organisms and humans. The risk factors and conceptual site model provide a framework for assessing contaminant risks.

Human or ecological risk assessments facilitate risk management decisions at contaminated sites. Specific risk assessment objectives include:

- Identifying relevant human and ecological receptors (e.g., children, adults, fish, wildlife)
- Determining if contaminants are present at levels that pose potential human health and/or ecological concerns (e.g., levels above applicable regulatory criteria based on health or environmental risk considerations)
- Determining how human or ecological receptors are exposed to the contaminants (e.g., ingestions of soil, dermal contact, inhalation of dust)

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[60] For example, USEPA Region 3 Risk-Based Concentrations (RBCs). http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/risk/human/index.htm.

[61] Examples include processes defined by the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) Phase II ESA Process; the British Columbia Ministry of Environment Canada (BC MOE) http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/contam_sites/guidance); and the Massachusetts Department of Environment http://www.mass.gov/dep/cleanup.

- Identifying the types of adverse effects that might result from exposure to the contaminants (e.g., effect on target organ, cancer, impaired growth or reproduction) in the absence of regulatory standards
- Quantifying the magnitude of health risks to human and ecological receptors based on a quantitative analysis of contaminant exposure and toxicity (e.g. calculate lifetime cancer risk or ratios of estimated exposure rates compared to safe exposure rates)
- Determining how current and proposed future land use influence the predicted risks (e.g. change of land use from industrial to residential with more sensitive receptors such as children)
- Quantifying the potential environmental and/or human health risks from off-site contaminant migration (e.g., consider if leaching and groundwater transport, or surface water transport results in exposure at adjacent lands/receptors)
- Determining if the risk is likely to remain stable, increase, or decrease with time in the absence of any remediation (e.g., consider if the contaminant is reasonably degradable and likely to remain in place, or be transported to other media)[62]

Addressing these objectives provides a basis to develop and implement risk reduction measures (e.g., clean-up, on-site controls) at the site. If such a need exists, the following additional objectives become relevant:

- Determining where, and in what conceptual manner, risk reduction measures should be implemented
- Identifying the preferred technologies (including engineering controls) needed to implement the conceptual risk reduction measures
- Developing a monitoring plan to ascertain whether risk reduction measures are effective
- Considering the need and appropriateness for institutional controls (e.g. deed restriction, land use restrictions) as part of a comprehensive approach

Permanent Risk Reduction Measures

The *risk factors* and *conceptual site model* within the contaminant risk approach described also provide a basis to manage and mitigate environmental contaminant health risks. The underlying principle is to reduce, eliminate, or control any or all of the three risk factors illustrated in Figure 1.8.1. A short list of examples of risk mitigation strategies is provided below, although actual strategies should be developed based on site-specific conditions, and the practicality of prevailing factors and site constraints. Regardless of the management options selected, the action plan should include, whenever possible, *contaminant source reduction* (i.e., net improvement of the site) as part of the overall strategy towards managing health risks at contaminated sites, as this alone provides for improved environmental quality.

Figure 1.8.2 presents a schematic of the inter-relationship of risk factors and example strategies to mitigate contaminant health risk by modifying the conditions of one or more risk factors to ultimately reduce contaminant exposure to the receptor. The selected approach should take into consideration the technical and financial feasibility (e.g. operability of a selected technology given the local availability of technical expertise and equipment and its associated costs).

Example risk mitigation strategies for contaminant source and exposure concentrations include:

[62] An example of a simplified quantitative risk assessment method is the ASTM E1739-95(2002) Standard Guide for Risk-Based Corrective Action Applied at Petroleum Release Sites and the ASTM E2081-00(2004)e1 Standard Guide for Risk-Based Corrective Action (at chemical release sites).

- Soil, sediment, and sludge:
  - In situ biological treatment (aerobic or anaerobic)
  - In situ physical/chemical treatment (e.g., soil vapor extraction with off-gas treatment, chemical oxidation)
  - In situ thermal treatment (e.g., steam injection, 6-phase heating)
  - Ex situ biological treatment (e.g., excavation and composting)
  - Ex situ physical/chemical treatment (e.g., excavation and stabilization)
  - Ex situ thermal treatment (e.g., excavation and thermal desorption or incineration)
  - Containment (e.g. landfill)
  - Natural attenuation
  - Other treatment processes
- Groundwater, surface water, and leachate:
  - In situ biological treatment (aerobic and/or aerobic)
  - In situ physical/chemical treatment (e.g., air sparging, zero-valent iron permeable reactive barrier)
  - Ex situ biological, physical, and or chemical treatment (i.e., groundwater extraction and treatment)
  - Containment (e.g., slurry wall or sheet pile barrier)
  - Natural attenuation
  - Other treatment processes
- Soil vapor intrusion:
  - Soil vapor extraction to reduce VOC contaminant source in soil
  - Installation of a sub-slab depressurization system to prevent migration of soil vapor into the building
  - Creating a positive pressure condition in buildings
  - Installation (during building construction) of an impermeable barrier below the building and/or an alternative flow pathway for soil vapor beneath building foundations (e.g., porous media and ventilation to shunt vapors away from building)

Example risk mitigation strategies for receptors include:

- Limiting or preventing access to contaminant by receptors (actions targeted at the receptor may include signage with instructions, fencing, or site security)
- Imposing health advisory or prohibiting certain practices leading to exposure such as fishing, crab trapping, shellfish collection
- Educating receptors (people) to modify behavior in order to reduce exposure (e.g., improved work practices, and use of protective clothing and equipment)

Example risk mitigation strategies for exposure pathways include:

- Providing an alternative water supply to replace, for example, a contaminated groundwater supply well
- Capping contaminated soil with at least 1m of clean soil to prevent human contact, as well as plant root or small mammal penetration into contaminated soils
- Paving over contaminated soil as an interim measure to negate the pathway of direct contact or dust generation and inhalation
- Using an interception trench and pump, and treat technologies to prevent contaminated groundwater from discharging into fish streams

The above-reference containment measures should also be considered for immediate implementation in situations where source reduction measures are expected to take time.

Occupational Health and Safety Considerations

Investigation and remediation of contaminated lands requires that workers be mindful of the occupational exposures that could arise from working in close contact with contaminated soil or other environmental media (e.g., groundwater, wastewater, sediments, and soil vapor). Occupational health and safety precautions should be exercised to minimize exposure, as described in Section 2 on Occupational Health and Safety. In addition, workers on contaminated sites should receive special health and safety training specific to contaminated site investigation and remediation activities.[63]

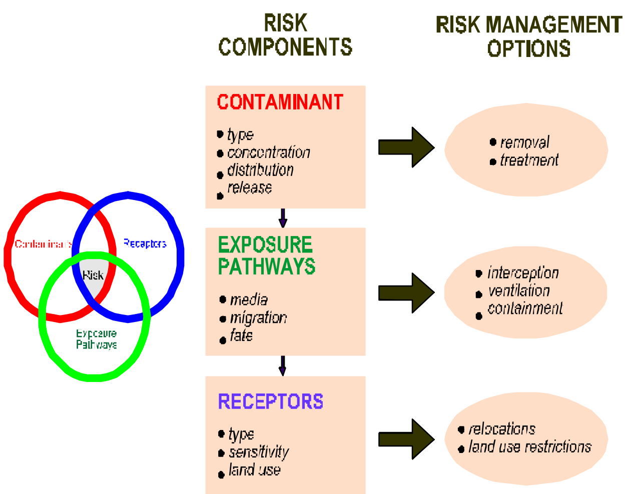

FIGURE 1.8.2: Inter-Relationship of Risk Factors and Management Options

[63] For example, US Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) regulations found at 40 CFR 1910.120. http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=9765