



# DOE's Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) Cleanup

## Community Questions and Answers

### Q1: What kind of contamination is at ETEC?

DOE's cleanup focuses on contamination from liquid metals and nuclear energy research and activities DOE conducted at SSFL from the 1950s to the 1990s.

- **Soil:** The primary chemical contaminants found in soil are polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), dioxins, and some heavy metals. The most frequently detected radioactive contaminants are cesium-137 and strontium-90. This contamination is not widespread but is concentrated in specific, well-defined areas. Extensive sampling, including a comprehensive radiological study led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has precisely mapped the contamination.
- **Groundwater:** The primary groundwater contaminants are chlorinated solvents, such as trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchloroethylene (PCE). There are also tritium and strontium-90 contamination found in a few wells. DOE's ongoing monitoring of over 100 wells across Area IV and the site's Northern Buffer Zone helps us track these contaminants and design effective treatment strategies.

### Q2: Where can the public see SSFL groundwater and air monitoring information?

DOE posts our quarterly and annual monitoring reports on our website. They can be accessed here:



[Environmental Monitoring](#)



[Groundwater Monitoring](#)



[Annual Site Environmental Reports](#)

### Q3: Who decides the final cleanup standards?

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) is the lead regulatory agency overseeing DOE's cleanup at SSFL. DOE detailed work plans are protective of human health and the environment, based on decades of scientific data. DOE works under the authority of state and federal regulators who review our cleanup plans and ensure they are protective. DTSC then approves the plans before work can begin.

#### Q4: How is waste removed from the site and where does it go?

Waste is removed from the site using excavation equipment and is characterized to determine its precise nature. All hazardous waste is then placed in containers and transported off-site for safe disposal at appropriately licensed and permitted facilities.

DOE follows the federally regulated process for characterizing, packaging, shipping, and disposing of all waste. These steps are managed and overseen by licensed and trained professionals who ensure the material is handled safely at all times. For example, all hazardous waste is placed in approved closed-top containers, while other waste is hauled away in trucks with secure covers. All shipments must meet the receiving facility's specific, approved Waste Acceptance Criteria.

#### Q5: Has any contamination migrated from the site?

Data from decades of comprehensive environmental studies indicates that contamination from DOE's former operations is localized and contained.

- **Groundwater:** Extensive groundwater monitoring includes over 100 strategically installed wells - in some cases beyond the SSFL property boundary. To date, monitoring data from these wells has not detected DOE-related groundwater contamination beyond the SSFL boundary.
- **Soil:** Extensive soil sampling surveys, including the independent 2012 EPA radiological study, confirm that soil contamination is limited to specific, localized operational areas within Area IV and the Northern Buffer Zone.
- **Air:** Multiple years of data from DOE perimeter air monitors confirm that what is in the air at the site is no different from the regional air quality, and that dust and contaminants from DOE activities are not migrating into the surrounding communities.

This is consistent with [DTSC's 2017 analysis](#) that concluded "Contamination at SSFL does not pose a health threat to users of Brandeis Bardin Institute, or other off-site areas."

DTSC's analysis can be accessed here:



#### Q6: Is the soil on-site safe to walk on?

Yes, it's safe to walk on the dirt here.

The levels of contamination in the soil do not pose a risk from walking on the site. The contamination is bound in the soil matrix itself; it is not loose dust that can easily be picked up or inhaled.

DOE's radiation protection professionals have confirmed through direct field measurements that walking onsite does not transfer contamination, even in areas with the highest radiological readings identified in the EPA 2012 study. This finding is consistent with established principles of health physics and federal regulations.