

Media Release

Environment Protection Authority



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Committee report released on site contamination

An EPA Board-appointed committee has released its report into the management of historic site contamination issues in South Australia.

The report contains 11 recommendations under the five themes of working together; building capacity; working with the community; transparency and accountability; and urban renewal – unlocking potential.

The committee was formed in 2014 after the Clovelly Park and Mitchell Park groundwater contamination case attracted considerable public attention.

Committee chair Cheryl Batagol, who is also Chairperson of the Victorian EPA, said the committee concluded that legacy site contamination is generally well managed but there were opportunities to improve.

“The EPA has procedures and protocols for regulating site contamination, which were applied in the case of Clovelly Park, however it was identified that improvements needed to be made, most specifically in the area of communicating with affected parties in a timely and clear fashion,” said Ms Batagol.

“Concerns were raised about the process and timeliness of notification of affected residents, leadership and coordination within government, and the reliability of the data on contamination and its interpretation by government experts.

“In undertaking this review, the committee listened to members of the community and organisations about their issues of most concern. This often had to do with the expectation to be engaged early, regularly and effectively, and having certainty that contamination is effectively managed.”

The committee was made up of senior state government members and public health experts, and reviewed areas including testing, monitoring and communicating historic site contamination, particularly in the way that potential health risks are prioritised.

Sustainability, Environment and Conservation Minister Ian Hunter welcomed the report.

“It is important that government listens, learns and adapts from past events, and with a clearer understanding of the community’s expectations, ensure that communication with the public is handled effectively in the future,” he said.

EPA Board Presiding Member Mia Handshin said the Board has endorsed the committee’s recommendations.

“This review presents an excellent blueprint for reform in strengthening the foundation for the effective management of site contamination in South Australia, in particular to better meet changing community expectations regarding communications and engagement,” said Ms Handshin.

EPA Chief Executive Tony Circelli says the EPA is has started to implement the committee's recommendations.

"The EPA is continuing to investigate historic contamination in former and existing industrial sites, and it's important that property owners and residents have complete confidence in the work we are doing," he added.

"We're already working within the EPA to review and improve our engagement with communities around contaminated sites and apply a project management approach to site contamination investigations.

"In addition, I've invited relevant chief executives to work with me to carry out the recommendations relating to cross-government policy.

"We've made significant progress in managing site contamination in the past five years. The reforms identified by the EPA Board Review along with the ongoing review of our practices and learnings from Australian and overseas EPAs will only further our efforts to address legacy contamination issues, and importantly ensure that the community is more involved and engaged in this work.

"Through the ongoing review of our practices, South Australians can be confident that the most effective practices will be employed in this State, and that South Australia remains at the forefront of proactively dealing with site contamination in Australia," said Mr Circelli.

"The technology to detect soil and groundwater contamination is continually improving and the medical science to determine the possible health impacts is also advancing."

A copy of the committee's report is available on the EPA website www.epa.sa.gov.au.