



# Midlothian Petition Community Site Update November 2005 Midlothian, Texas

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## Background

The city of Midlothian in Ellis County, Texas is approximately 30 miles south of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. For many years industrial operations have been central to the town's economy. Currently three cement plants and a steel mill are the largest industries in Midlothian. In 1991, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) began environmental air monitoring in the area and in the mid-1990s, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted a cumulative risk assessment for the area. In the mid 1990s, due to concerns that substances in the air might cause health problems, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), formerly the Texas Department of Health, examined the available health information for the Ellis County area.

## Petition

In July 2005, residents of Midlothian petitioned the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). The petition acknowledges the historic involvement of the TCEQ and the EPA, but it argues that health effects, including respiratory illnesses and birth defects, are elevated in the area. This presents an unresolved issue in the town, and the petition indicates the following areas of concern:

- Emitted chemicals have not been fully characterized. All emissions are not identified.
- Persistence of emissions, the effects of continuous low level exposure, and the synergistic effects of emitted chemicals
- Impact on pregnant women, infants, children, the elderly, and the immunosuppressed.

- Protectiveness of the regulatory (TCEQ) health-based screening guidelines
- Effectiveness of air monitoring from TCEQ's monitoring stations, in part, because they are only run periodically
- DSHS' reliance on data collected by other agencies, as well as the apparent oversight of health issues not related to cancer or birth defects (i.e. respiratory problems)

The petition makes the following claims regarding the health of the Midlothian community:

- Rates of health problems, including leukemia, birth defects, and childhood total cancer, are higher in Ellis County when compared to state-wide values.
- Rates for birth defects, including hypospadias/epispadias and others not specified in the petition are higher in Midlothian when compared to state-wide values.
- A DSHS study of a Down Syndrome cluster in Ellis County was conducted but not designed to consider environmental factors.
- A higher incidence of respiratory problems has been identified in Midlothian, as stated in a symptom survey conducted by Legator, et al. (1998)

The petition was accepted by the ATSDR in late summer 2005. ATSDR and DSHS are working together to address community concerns by conducting a public health consultation to evaluate the possible health implications of exposures to environmental contaminants from the air emissions.

## Current activities

As part of the health consultation process DSHS is evaluating previous studies and environmental data to determine whether air emissions have the potential to affect the health of the people in Midlothian, as well as, other nearby communities.

DSHS is currently reviewing environmental air monitoring data collected by TCEQ between December 1973 and March 2005. This data is being evaluated using ATSDR's health assessment comparison values (HAC values).

## What are HAC values?

The first step in assessing if there is a potential public health impact of exposure to chemicals in the environment is to compare environmental sampling data to *health assessment comparison (HAC)* values. HAC values are media-specific contaminant concentrations used by health assessors to screen contaminants for further evaluation. By comparing contaminant concentrations to HAC values for both non-cancer and cancer end points, scientists are able to consider what possible implications exposures to the contaminant may have on the community. Exceeding an HAC value does not necessarily mean that a contaminant represents a public health threat, but does suggest that the contaminant warrants further consideration.

### Where to get more information

You can find more information about the Midlothian Petition Site on the following DSHS website:

[www.dshs.state.tx.us/epitox/assess.shtm](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/epitox/assess.shtm)

For more information, please contact DSHS community involvement liaison Nancy Ingram at 1-800-588-1248 (toll-free) or by email at [nancy.ingram@dshs.state.tx.us](mailto:nancy.ingram@dshs.state.tx.us).

