



## BUTLER MINE TUNNEL SUPERFUND SITE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

CITY OF PITTSTON, LUZERNE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

MARCH 2011

EPA has prepared this fact sheet to help respond to recent concerns related to the Butler Mine Tunnel Superfund Site. If you have additional questions, or would like to meet one-on-one with EPA and health representatives, please let us know by contacting:

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### **Q: Are there current risks to my health from the Butler Mine Tunnel?**

Currently, there are no health risks related to contamination from the Butler Mine Tunnel (BMT) site. However, EPA does understand that some residents have expressed concern about health issues being attributed to the Butler Mine Tunnel site and we are working with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADoH) to offer to meet with residents one-on-one to talk about their individual health concerns.

### **Q: Does contamination exist at the Butler Mine Tunnel site?**

Yes. EPA does continue to detect residual oil and one chemical called bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate above drinking water standards near the Hi-Way Auto Service (HWAS) station borehole (the source of Site contamination where the original illegal disposal of oily waste occurred). However, people are not drinking that water so they are not being

exposed to the chemical. Also, this chemical is not volatile and does not form vapors.

In addition, EPA recently completed a Five Year Review of our remedy for the site and found that it continues to be protective of human health and the environment.

### **Q: How does the Butler Mine Tunnel site affect the current city sewer project?**

The two projects are unrelated. The Phase II of the city sewer project is being constructed under Mill street. The Butler Mine Tunnel does not run under the Mill or Carroll streets area and therefore, EPA does not expect there to be any impact to the sewer project or area residences from the Butler Mine Tunnel site.

### **Q: What are mine boreholes?**

During mining operations, boreholes were drilled into the underground coal mines to serve as air vents for the mines.

As in the case of the HWAS borehole, some individuals and companies used the boreholes to dispose of various wastes, including, residential and commercial wastes containing hazardous substances and waste oil.

### **Q: What is EPA doing to monitor the Butler Mine Tunnel site?**

Twice per year, EPA monitors "Borehole 11" (near the HWAS borehole), where there is residual oil and bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate, and we monitor the BMT discharge to the Susquehanna River.

“Borehole 11” is sampled to evaluate the changes in the source of the contamination. EPA also samples the BMT discharge to the river to evaluate the water quality of the discharged water. Discharge samples indicate that no volatile, vapor forming contaminants have been detected since regular monitoring began in 2005.

Over the last six years, EPA’s samples have shown a significant decrease in the amount of contamination in “Borehole 11” compared to the data from the 1980s.

Other actions EPA is taking to protect human health and the environment include:

- ◆ Establishing an Administrative Center to predict when a discharge of oil and hazardous substances may occur.
- ◆ Conducting on-river training exercises, tunnel monitoring, and flush-out response system deployments for actual or potential oil flush-outs.

**Q: Does EPA plan to take more samples in the community?**

At this time, EPA does not have plans to take samples in the community because we don’t see any evidence that contamination from the Butler Mine Tunnel is impacting people’s drinking water or air. However, EPA will continue to monitor the site and to work with the health experts, and if new information becomes available, we will share it with the community.

**Q: What is a cancer cluster?**

A cancer cluster is defined by health agencies as a greater-than-expected number of cancer cases that occurs within a group of people in a geographic area over a period of time.

It is natural for a person to suspect that a cancer cluster exists when several loved ones, neighbors, or co-workers are diagnosed with cancer. However, what appears to be a cluster may actually reflect the expected number of cancer cases within the group or area.

A suspected cancer cluster is more likely to be a true cluster, rather than a coincidence, if it involves one or more of the following factors:

- ◆ A large number of cases of one type of cancer, rather than several different types.

- ◆ An increased number of cases of a certain type of cancer in an age group that is not usually affected by that type of cancer.

For more information about cancer clusters, visit:  
[Http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/risk/clusters](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/risk/clusters)

## SITE HISTORY

The Butler Tunnel was constructed prior to the 1930’s as a drainage tunnel for underground coal mines via a series of interconnecting drainage ditches.

Flow from the tunnel discharges directly into the Susquehanna River, just upstream from the Fort Jenkins Bridge.

The tunnel drains an approximate five-square mile area of abandoned underground coal mine areas.

The tunnel still continues to drain the mine workings. During mining operations, boreholes were drilled into the underground coal mines to serve as air vents for the mines.

Contamination at the Butler Mine Tunnel Site was caused by illegal disposal of oily waste and industrial waste water into a mine borehole located at the Hi-Way Auto Service station located near the intersection of Route 315 and Route 81. The illegal disposals occurred in 1978-79.

EPA added the site to the National Priorities List in 1987 and remedial construction was completed in 2005. For more detailed information about EPA’s involvement at the Butler Mine Tunnel, please visit us at:

<http://www.epa.gov/reg3hwmd/npl/PAD980508451.htm>

Note: The Butler Mine Tunnel Site does not include the former coal mine workings underlying the City of Pittston.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like to meet with EPA and ATSDR to talk about health or environmental concerns from the Butler Mine Tunnel site, please contact:

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