

Red Rock Road Public Health Report



WHAT DID SHINE FIND?

SHINE evaluated the public health impact of Red Rock Road and found that the arsenic levels in the soil are of health concern.

- There are sections of Red Rock Road where arsenic levels pose an increased health risk for adults and children who live next to the road or frequently use or play on the road.
- SHINE recommends that adults and children avoid areas of the road where mine tailings are exposed (areas that appear red), until these areas are covered or cleaned up.

What is Red Rock Road?

Red Rock Road (RRR) is a 17-mile long old railroad grade that runs through part of the city of Sutherlin eastward. It was constructed with waste, or **mine tailings**, from Bonanza mine. These mine tailings we now know are contaminated with arsenic and mercury. Some sections of RRR are privately owned and used as driveways while others are publicly owned and used for recreation.

Why should I be concerned about Red Rock Road?

There are sections of RRR where mine tailings are found at the surface. This means that children or adults that walk or play on these areas of the road may come in contact with the arsenic. Long-term exposure to arsenic has been shown to cause cancer and a wide range of other health effects. (*See back for more information on health effects of arsenic exposure.*)

Arsenic is found naturally in higher levels in the Sutherlin area. Sutherlin area residents who drink from contaminated private wells may be exposed to arsenic. While the arsenic in wells does not come from Red Rock Road, it could contribute to residents' overall exposure.



Am I or my child going to get sick from playing on Red Rock Road?

Although there is an increased risk from accidental swallowing arsenic-contaminated soil at RRR, SHINE does not expect those who have spent time on or around Red Rock Road will get sick from arsenic exposure unless a person experiences an unusually high and frequent exposure.

In order to reduce the *risk* of any possible health effects, SHINE recommends that residents take the steps outlined below.

What can I do to prevent exposure to arsenic?

- Avoid spending time on Red Rock Road, especially the areas where the soil appears red
- Prevent your children from playing on the road.
- Let others know of the contamination, especially those who are new to the area.
- If you live in the Sutherlin area and drink from a well, consider having it tested for arsenic. *See back for more information on whom to contact about testing your water.*

What is arsenic?

Arsenic is a natural element found in certain types of rock. Throughout parts of Oregon, natural mineral deposits contain large quantities of arsenic. Arsenic in these deposits may be taken up by the groundwater that supplies private wells. Activities such as mining may also bring arsenic to the surface, where people can come into contact with it.

Arsenic can enter your body through swallowing, breathing, or by skin contact with it. The most common way a person is exposed to arsenic is by ingesting it.

How can arsenic affect my health?

ACUTE ARSENIC POISONING: The accidental swallowing of large amounts of arsenic within a short period of time (days-1 month) may cause symptoms such as fever; nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea; abnormal heart rhythm; respiratory symptoms; or a “pins and needles” sensation in hands and feet.

CHRONIC ARSENIC POISONING: Long-term exposure to arsenic (years) may lead to a darkening of the skin and the appearance of small “corns” or “warts” on the palms of hand or soles of the feet. It can also damage the reproductive, neurological, and cardiovascular systems.

Can arsenic cause cancer? Exposure to arsenic over a long period of time may increase your risk of skin, lung, kidney and bladder cancers. It is very difficult to determine whether individual cases of cancer are due to arsenic exposure or caused by other factors.

Please keep in mind that all of the above symptoms could be caused by conditions other than arsenic exposure.

How can I get my well water tested for arsenic?

If you live in the Sutherlin area and are interested in having your well tested for arsenic, please contact Terry Westfall, Environmental Health Specialist, at 541-440-3569 or SHINE at 503-731-4025.

Where can I get more information about well water safety?

If you have general questions about well water safety, call the Oregon Well Water Program, at (541) 737-6294 or visit their website: <http://wellwater.oregonstate.edu/>

Where can I find the full Red Rock Road report?

You can download a copy of the full report at the website listed below or review at your local library. SHINE will be accepting comments on the report from the public until December 11, 2006.

<http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/shine/rrrsite.shtml>

Douglas County Public Library, Sutherlin Branch
210 E. Central
Sutherlin, Oregon

If you have questions about the findings or would like more information, please contact:

Kathryn Toepel, Toxicologist or
Julie Early, Public Health Educator

SHINE Program
503-731-4025

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