

# San Germán Ground Water Contamination Site Draft Public Health Assessment Summary

Public Comment Release – January 17, 2012 – San Germán, Puerto Rico  
**Public Comment Period Closes April 16, 2012**

## About ATSDR and this Fact Sheet

ATSDR stands for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. It is a federal public health agency and part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR promotes healthy and safe environments and prevents harmful exposures to toxic substances. Congress requires that ATSDR conduct public health activities at contaminated sites on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) National Priority List (NPL).

This fact sheet gives information about ATSDR's recent report on the San Germán Ground Water Contamination site in San Germán, Puerto Rico. ATSDR prepared this report to determine whether the chemicals found at this site could have affected the health of people in San Germán and what actions need to be taken to protect public health.

## Background

- Man-made chemicals called chlorinated volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were detected at low levels in municipal drinking water supply wells in San Germán from 1999-2006. In 2006, contaminant levels exceeded drinking water standards, and the wells were shut down.
- The VOCs found in the wells are used for degreasing, industrial cleaning, and dry cleaning. So far, the source of the contamination in San Germán has not been found.
- EPA has added the San Germán Ground Water Contamination site to the NPL. ATSDR focused its evaluation on how VOCs in water from the municipal wells may have affected health. Data on other substances or from other portions of the site were not available.
- EPA is working with the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board (EQB) to continue investigating the site.

## Why is there a concern about VOCs in well water?

VOCs from well water might enter the bodies of people who drink the water, breathe in droplets of water, breathe in VOCs that evaporated from the water, or get the water on their skin. VOCs that get into people's bodies might cause harmful effects. Whether the VOCs cause harmful effects depends on the concentration of VOCs in the water and how often and for how long people use the water.

## San Germán Ground Water Contamination Site *(continued from front)*

### ATSDR's Draft Findings

- Today, no one in San Germán is drinking water from the contaminated wells. The wells have been shut down or inactive since mid-2006. Water is not available from these wells.
- In the past, drinking or using water from the contaminated wells likely did not cause harm. Local authorities measured VOCs in the municipal well water from late 1999 to 2006. The VOC levels were below levels known to cause any harmful health effects.
- ATSDR needs more information about where the VOCs began and how people were exposed (this is called an exposure pathway). For example, ATSDR needs more information about private wells in the area, exposure near source areas, and how the VOCs might travel from the well water into the air in people's homes (vapor intrusion). The source and extent of the VOC contamination have not yet been identified. VOC levels might be higher near the source of the contamination and in areas between the source and the affected wells.

### ATSDR's Recommendations

- EPA and/or EQB should continue efforts to find the source of the VOC contamination, measure how far the contamination extends throughout the community, and clean up and prevent further groundwater contamination.

ATSDR will evaluate additional data collected by EPA and EQB and update the findings of this PHA, if necessary.

### How to Review and Comment on ATSDR's Draft Findings

The ATSDR report on the San Germán Ground Water Contamination site is available for review at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/HCPHA.asp?State=PR>. A copy of the report is also available at the Biblioteca Pública, Calle Padres Agustinos, #11, in San Germán.

Your comments will improve the quality of the report. Send comments **by April 16, 2012** to [ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov](mailto:ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov), or mail to:

ATSDR Records Center Attn: Rolanda Morrison  
RE: San Germán Ground Water Contamination NPL Site, San Germán, PR  
1600 Clifton Road, NE (MS F-09)  
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Comments received during the public comment period, without the names of who submitted them, and ATSDR responses will appear in an appendix to the final PHA. If requested under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the names of those who submit comments may be releasable under FOIA rules.