

ATSDR's Template for Letter Health Consultations (LHCs)

Instructions for Using the Template

This template will guide health assessors in their preparation of LHCs. The recommended length for the letter text is 10 pages or less. Keep the text short by only including essential information to meet the request and provide enough context to support review. Put any sizable tables, figures, and calculations in attachments or enclosures since the letter has limited pages.

Instructions for authors appear in green italicized text and placeholder text appears in yellow highlight. Replace yellow text with what is appropriate for your report; remove green italicized text and any sections that are not needed. Replace the text prompts (i.e., "Start typing here using [ATSDR_body_text] style.") with your site-specific text.

Refer to the [PHAGM Putting It All Together section](#) for details on the specific information to include in the document. Additional guidance is indicated in the template sections that follow with direct links to those resources. Be sure to follow ATSDR's best practices for writing documents in [PHAGM Tips for Preparing Written Documents](#). [CDC's Environmental Health Thesaurus](#) can help you write about environmental health using plain language. Also, it will be helpful to look at examples of reports the agency has already published in [ATSDR's Publication Repository](#).

For reference, there is also a companion file that provides frequently asked questions (FAQs) to help as you use ATSDR's Word template. This document is located in the PHAGM resource page in the "Putting It All Together" section.

ATSDR

Letter Health Consultation

Site Name

Subheading (if appropriate)

Release Version

Date

[Insert ATSDR (or state agency) Letterhead] *[Intranet link to ATSDR's letterhead: <https://intranet.cdc.gov/brandidentitystandards/templates-atsdr.html>]*

[Month Day, Year]

[Name of Recipient]

[Title]

[Affiliation]

[Address]

[Contact Information]

Re: [Subject line]

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Abc,

Provide a brief summary of the site that includes the following:

- *What was requested and by whom?*
 - *Who was/is/might be impacted?*
- *What did we find? (abbreviated conclusions)*
- *What are the limitations of our findings (if needed)?*
- *What needs to be done? (abbreviated next steps)*
 - *A statement indicating the remainder of the letter is how we arrived at the conclusion(s)/next step(s).*

Include language in the summary that says "ATSDR (or state agency) evaluated the site following the agency's (or ATSDR's) public health assessment (PHA) process, as summarized in [Attachment A](#), and detailed in the [Explanation of ATSDR's PHA Process](#)."

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents](#)

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Background

Discuss pertinent background information. Use clear writing techniques.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents](#)

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Statement of Issue and Purpose

Discuss why ATSDR (or state agency) is here and what the issues are.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents](#)

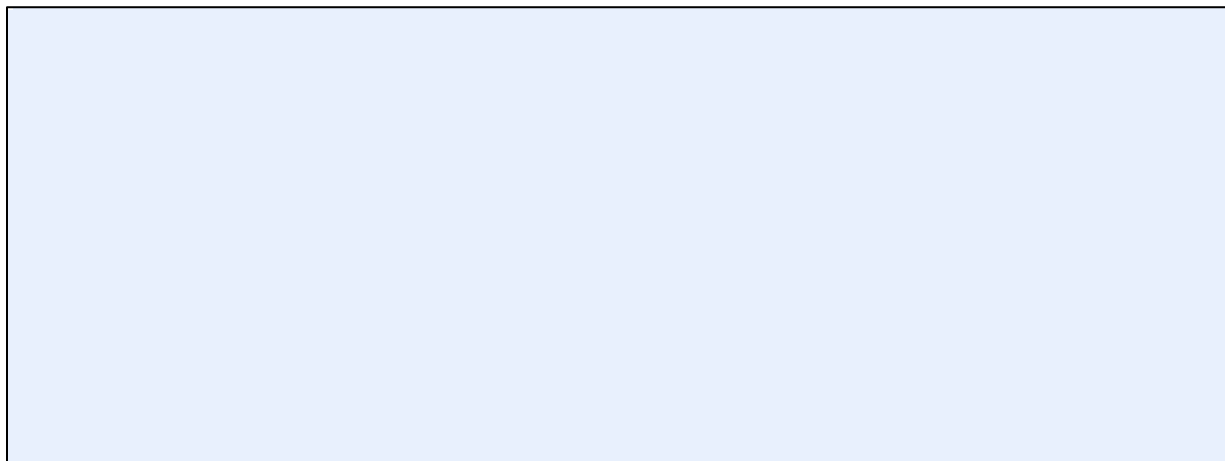
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Site Description and Timeline

Briefly describe the site's location, use, timeline (placeholder below), geology/hydrogeology (if warranted), maps (placeholder below), site visit, and other relevant information.

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Figure 1. Site Location Map



[REPLACE PLACEHOLDER IMAGE BOX WITH SITE MAP IF USED]

Insert ATSDR (or state agency) sources or notes (such as abbreviations and acronyms)

Table 1. Timeline of insert text

Date/Year	Event

Insert ATSDR (or state agency) sources or notes (such as abbreviations and acronyms)

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Getting Familiar with the Site](#) and [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents](#)

Include the section headings that follow as needed.

Community Description and Concerns

Describe the community demographics such as by age groups and race/ethnicity.

Introduce community concerns at the site and efforts/steps to determine health concerns. Address the concerns in a later section, if applicable. Describe children's health considerations.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Engaging the Community](#) and [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents](#)

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Sampling Data

Describe data sources. Focus on data used to evaluate exposure and why they are representative of exposures and are of high quality. Discuss data gaps as needed.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Selecting Sampling Data](#) and [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents](#)

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Scientific Evaluations

Exposure Pathway Analysis

Describe potential and completed pathways.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Evaluating Exposure Pathways](#)

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Screening Analysis

Describe the screening analysis.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Screening Analysis](#)

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Exposure Point Concentrations (EPCs) and Exposure Calculations

Describe the calculation method. Identify potential contaminants of concern (COCs) above hazard quotients (HQs) and cancer risks (CRs) that need further evaluation.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Exposure Point Concentrations and Exposure Calculations](#)

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In-Depth Toxicological Effects Analysis

Describe the evaluation process. Summarize decisions about possible health effects.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM In-depth Toxicological Effects Analysis](#)

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Evaluation of Health Outcome Data (HOD)

Include this section if a HOD review is appropriate and HOD were evaluated.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM In-depth Toxicological Effects Analysis, Evaluate Site-Specific Health Effects Data \(Health Outcome Data\)](#)

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Addressing Community Concerns

Include this section if there are specific health concerns from community members that can be addressed.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Documents \(Addressing Community Concerns\)](#)

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Summary of Limitations and Uncertainties

Summarize major limitations and uncertainties identified throughout the PHA process.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Evaluating Limitations](#)

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Conclusions

Use the same conclusion text as included in the summary conclusions and put in plain language.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Developing Conclusions](#)

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Recommendations

Use the same text as included in the next steps section from the summary and put in plain language.

Refer to Guidance in: [PHAGM Putting It All Together, Determining Recommendations](#)

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Please feel free to contact me at [email address] or by phone at [phone number], if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Affiliation]

cc: [List additional recipients]

Enclosure(s): [List enclosed documents]

References

List sources cited in the document using formatting based on the NCEH/ATSDR Style Manual, Section III. Certain minimum information must be present in each reference.

- Author (for more than six authors, list the first six, followed by “et al.”)
- Title of work
- Publisher with place and year of publication
- Inclusive page numbers

Other rules to follow include the following:

- Do not italicize document titles in the reference list.
- Only capitalize the first word and proper names in a title.
- Do not use periods in abbreviations unless they are part of the document title or official name (e.g., ABC Company).
- Follow National Library of Medicine style for abbreviating journal titles. You can use PubMed (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) for help in doing that.
- Include every reference you cite in the text in the reference list. Likewise, every reference in the reference list must be cited in the text.
- Enclose citations in brackets. If possible, place the citation just before a mark of punctuation (e.g., a semicolon or period). Otherwise, insert the citation at a logical place in the sentence.
- Use either of two reference citation systems: numbered or author-date.
- Omit duplicative numerals when referring to a range of pages. In the following example, the redundant “34” of “349” was omitted from the page range: Lee JA. Understanding environmental health. JAMA. 2008;12(72):347–9.
- Use acronyms for in-text citations in the author-date style, when appropriate. In the reference list, always put the acronym in brackets followed by the full name. Refer to the example below as a guide.

[ATSDR] Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. 2022. Public health assessment guidance manual. Atlanta: US Department of Health and Human Services [accessed 1/1/2025]. Available from: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pha-guidance/index.html>.

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Attachments

Include supplemental materials for any parts of the evaluation. Only include information necessary to support the contents of the letter. The [Brief Summary of ATSDR's Public Health Assessment \(PHA\) Process](#) is a required attachment in all documents, and is already included (and must be retained) in the template as [Attachment A](#).

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Attachment A: Brief Summary of ATSDR's Public Health Assessment (PHA) Process

ATSDR follows the PHA process to find out:

- Whether people living near a hazardous waste site are being exposed to toxic substances.
- Whether that exposure is harmful.
- What must be done to stop or reduce exposure.

The PHA process is a step-by-step consistent approach during which ATSDR:

- Establishes communication mechanisms, including [engaging communities](#) at the beginning of site activities and involves them throughout the process to respond to their health concerns.
- Collects many different kinds of [site information](#).
- Obtains, compiles, and evaluates the usability and quality of environmental and biological [sampling data](#) (and sometimes modeling data) to examine environmental contamination at a site.
- Conducts four main, sequential scientific evaluations.
 - [Exposure pathways evaluation](#) to identify past, present, and future site-specific exposure situations, and categorize them as completed, potential, or eliminated.
 - [Screening analysis](#) to compare the available sampling data to media-specific environmental screening levels (ATSDR comparison values [CVs] and non-ATSDR screening levels). This identifies potential contaminants of concern that require further evaluation for completed and potential exposure pathways.
 - [Exposure Point Concentrations \(EPCs\) and exposure calculations](#) for contaminants flagged as requiring further evaluation in completed and potential exposure pathways. It involves calculating EPCs, using the estimated EPCs to perform exposure calculations, and determining which site-specific scenarios requires an in-depth toxicological effects analysis.
 - [In-depth toxicological effects evaluation](#), if necessary, based on the three previous scientific evaluations. This step looks more closely at contaminant-specific information in the context of site exposures. This evaluation can also help determine if there is a potential for non-cancer or cancer health effects.
- Summarizes findings and next steps, while acknowledging uncertainties and limitations.
- Provides recommendations to site-related entities, partner agencies, and communities to prevent and minimize harmful exposures.

The sequence of steps can differ based on site-specific factors. For instance, health assessors might define an exposure unit before or after the screening analysis.

For more detail on the PHA process, please visit [*Explanation of ATSDR's PHA Process Evaluation*](#). Readers can also refer to [*ATSDR's Public Health Assessment Guidance Manual*](#) for all information related to the step-wise PHA process.

Attachment B:

Appendix Subheading

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