

Frequently Asked Questions

13. I noticed that smoke is being pumped out of the top of the barriers/railings during site working hours. What is it?

This is not smoke, it is the odour control system, which sprays a fine mist of water and a dilute deodoriser, explained above (see question 12). They work much in the same way as household "air fresheners" and "neutralisers".

(Information provided by: South Cambridgeshire District Council)

14. What precautions are being made to make sure that any emissions from the site are safe?

In order to treat the contamination it is necessary to excavate the soils from the ground, which inevitably releases odours. Best available techniques are being used on site to control air emissions and odours as far as reasonably practicable. In addition to mechanical and physical controls, environmental engineers from both Vertase FLI and Atkins are actively monitoring emissions arising from the site. This information is fed back immediately to the site to allow any required changes to works to be made. Constant air monitoring is also in place with analysis being carried out by an independent laboratory. Vertase FLI have been made aware of recent concerns from local residents regarding odours from the site and they are continuing to develop alternative methods to solve the problem.

If the odours persist in causing a nuisance then certain operations on site may be suspended until an appropriate method of controlling the emissions is found.

(Information provided by: Environment Agency)

15. Are odours being tested where they are most concentrated, rather than at random spots?

Both. A comprehensive monitoring regime is in place monitoring and analysing both on and off site, at fixed locations, locations in response to complaints as well as at random locations.

(Information provided by: Environment Agency)

16. Are the people involved with making public health decisions aware of the patchy nature of the distribution of odours?

The site team and regulators are aware of this and take this into account when investigating concerns. This is why it is important

to telephone the Environment Agency hotline (0800 80 70 60) at the time the smell is affecting you/your activities in order to give a better understanding of how processes on site/wind direction/weather conditions are affecting the distribution of odours.

(Information provided by: South Cambridgeshire District Council)

17. Is any organisation looking at potential toxicology issues?

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) are providing public health advice. The HPA is given copies of all air monitoring data by SCDC for comment and have raised no toxicology concerns to date.

(Information provided by: Health Protection Agency)

18. Why not just leave the contamination in the ground?

Since the 1940's the site was involved in the production of agrochemicals including pesticides and herbicides. This has resulted in contamination of soil and groundwater beneath the site. Due to the risk posed to the groundwater and nearby watercourses, the site was determined as Contaminated Land in 2003 under Part IIa of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and designated a Special Site for regulation by the Environment Agency. The site must therefore be remediated and cannot be left in its current form as it poses a potential threat to the Riddy Brook and River Cam. The site has also been granted outline permission for residential and mixed use development subject to it being remediated to a standard suitable for these uses.

(Information provided by: South Cambridgeshire District Council)

19. Why can the contamination not be taken off site and out of our neighbourhood?

Taking soil off site would still generate smells as the material would need to be excavated and then transported. There would also be the impact of construction traffic on local roads with numerous vehicles coming and going from the site.

Government and European Policy in recent years has moved away from taking material away to landfill. The emphasis is now placed on remediation being carried out in a sustainable way, which involves treating contaminated material at source to an acceptable standard and re-using it where possible.

(Information provided by: South Cambridgeshire District Council)

20. What happens to the soil once it is treated?

The soil is comprehensively sampled and tested at a laboratory and once it has met stringent levels required to make sure that there will be no further unacceptable risk to groundwater and human health, it is put back into the ground.

(Information provided by: South Cambridgeshire District Council)

21. If it is not suitable to allow people to live on it now, how is it safe to clean up?

The site is being remediated by a specialist contractor who is controlling the process to make sure that it is carried out safely.

The works are also being independently supervised by an environmental consultant who is permanently on site and they are visited regularly by the Environment Agency and South Cambridgeshire District Council as regulators.

(Information provided by: South Cambridgeshire District Council)

22. Have the risks to workers on site been assessed?

Full Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessments and risk assessments for workers on site have been carried out and all required precautions are being taken. A strict policy with regards to site health and safety is being enforced at the site. All workers within what is referred to as the 'dirty' zone of the site wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) without exception and this is strictly enforced.

(Information provided by: Vertase FLI)

23. Why weren't the site workers wearing protective clothing when I walked past the site?

All employees and site visitors take special precautions including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when on site. This should not be confused with people entering the site from the A10 or those walking around the neighbourhood who do not require any special equipment. The site is separated into two zones, the "clean" zone is the area where the site access and compound are situated. PPE is not required in these areas. On entering the site itself or the "dirty" zone as it is known, where remediation is being carried out, full PPE is required.

(Information provided by: Vertase FLI)