

# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



ASARCO Superfund Site, Ruston/Tacoma, Washington

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10

September 2005

## Cleanup work resumes on yards in Ruston

EPA and Asarco amended the 2005 budget for the Asarco trust fund last week to provide additional money for cleaning up the yards at 13 homes where work had started but not been completed. Asarco's contractor, MRC, was forced to suspend cleanup work after Asarco filed for bankruptcy and could not pay for the remaining work. Asarco received approval from the bankruptcy court to amend the trust budget. MRC was back in Ruston the day after the bankruptcy court ruling to finish the remaining yards. Asarco filed for bankruptcy on August 11, which means its outstanding debts are suspended while the company reorganizes under court supervision.

### Q&A: Questions and Answers

**Q:** *We were supposed to have our yards cleaned this year. Will this still happen?*

Asarco was planning to use non-trust fund money to clean up an additional 14 properties this year. Work has not yet begun at those homes, although some homeowners have done preparatory work such as digging up garden plants. As a result of the bankruptcy, Asarco cannot spend money for additional yard cleanups in Ruston. EPA Region 10 is pursuing money from the trust fund to pay for cleanup at the additional 14 homes as its highest priority this year. The final decision will be made by EPA Headquarters after reviewing the needs nation-wide. An agreement must then be reached with Asarco in order to amend the 2005 trust fund budget. If money is not received this year, we will seek to prioritize those homes for cleanup using 2006 trust fund money.

**Q:** *When are you going to sample our yard?*

Sampling of yards is currently being conducted in Zone 4 of the Ruston/North Tacoma Study Area (a map of the sampling boundaries is posted online at <http://yosemite.epa.gov/R10/cleanup.nsf/sites/Asarco>). 300 yards were scheduled for sampling this year. EPA is requesting trust fund money to continue sampling this year, but some or all of the sampling may need to be completed in 2006. Sampling of all properties within the site area will be completed in one to three more years.

### What is the Asarco Trust Fund?

In 2003, as part of a settlement of a lawsuit with the United States, Asarco set up a \$100 million environmental trust fund for pollution cleanups at Asarco sites across the country. Each year, money is allocated to clean up sites based on need, risk and other factors. The yard cleanups in Ruston/North Tacoma are a high priority.

**Q:** *How can I get my yard sampling results?*

EPA is in the process of taking over management of Asarco's database for tracking sampling results and other cleanup information. It may take up to a month before we can get the results to homeowners.

**Q:** *What should I do regarding my health screening results? Is screening going to continue?*

Health screenings were being conducted under the terms of a class-action lawsuit and not under an agreement with EPA. To find out information about your results or about the future of screenings in the area, you may contact Glenn Rollins at the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department at 253-798-3503, or the class-action attorney Eileen Concannon with Riddell Williams Law Firm at 206-624-3600 or 800-473-1211. Asarco will no longer be able to fund health screenings for residents, and EPA does not plan to seek an alternative option to continue the screenings at this time.



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**Q:** *What is going on with the information center?  
The number is disconnected.*

Asarco no longer has money available to continue operating the information center at 5219 North Shirley Street. If you have questions about cleanup activities, you may contact EPA at the numbers listed above.

**Q:** *Can I clean up my own yard and take the contaminated soil to the Asarco site?*

EPA prefers that you do not try and clean up your own yard. If you are concerned about possible contamination, you can limit potential exposure by making sure exposed soil areas are covered with beauty bark, clean topsoil, or other material. Liability and access issues prevent homeowners from being able to take contaminated soil to the Asarco site themselves. Furthermore, the Asarco trust fund cannot be used to cover costs paid by homeowners to clean up their own yards.

**Q:** *Can I get MRC to take the soil to the Asarco site if I clean up my own yard?*

This would need to be worked out between MRC, Asarco, and the homeowner.

**Q:** *What's happening with the smelter site?*

According to Asarco, the company will be allowed to continue to pay for cleanup work at properties it owns, including the smelter. Work to be completed this year includes capping the landfill on the site. The company is also looking for a buyer for the 67-acre smelter property. The buyer must be willing to take on remaining cleanup costs at the site. EPA will work closely with any future owners to ensure the cleanup is completed and the site safe for redevelopment.

**Q:** *Can I contact Asarco directly?*

To contact Asarco staff, you may leave a message at Asarco's central number 253-752-1470.

**For more information, please contact:**

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