

Pantex INFO

Public Health & Pantex

Many studies and reviews have been conducted to assess Pantex's influence on various environmental, safety and health matters. One such study was completed in 1998 by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). The ATSDR is an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that conducts public health assessments nationally.

The 200-plus page report explains there is no evidence that Pantex operations have posed a threat to public health. Some quotes from the report follow:

- “The Department of Energy (DOE) Pantex Plant near Amarillo, Texas, does not pose a threat to public health from any site release at this time based on currently available environmental sampling data. No site-related contaminants are currently accessible on- or off-site at levels that would cause adverse health effects.”
- “Residents raised questions about excessive cancer rates in Carson, Potter, Randall, and Armstrong counties, excessive birth defects, and other adverse health effects they believed to be related to environmental releases from the site. Although the number of cases and/or deaths reported for some types of cancers in those counties may be higher than what would be expected based on comparison with numbers for other populations, an ATSDR review of available environmental data indicated that it is unlikely that area residents come into contact with amounts of chemicals or radioactive substances from the Plant significant enough to cause adverse health effects. Thus, Pantex Plant is probably not the cause of the higher than expected levels of cancer found in this area.”
- “Air monitoring for radionuclides (uranium [U], plutonium [Pu], and tritium) in the 1990s shows the atmospheric concentrations of the U and Pu radionuclides to be at levels that would not cause adverse health effects. Comparisons of air concentrations around Pantex with those for Austin and El Paso, Texas, show the air around Pantex actually contains less radiological contaminants than the air in those two cities. Tritium concentrations have been elevated around Pantex in the past as a result of a major release in May 1989. The elevated tritium levels, however, have *not* resulted in radiation exposures or doses above levels that would cause adverse health effects.”
- “The Pantex Plant Department of Energy (DOE) site was proposed for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Priorities List (NPL) in July 1991. In August 1991, representatives of the Panhandle Area Neighbors and Landowners (PANAL), Peace Farm, Sustainability in Technologies, Agriculture and Nature's Diversity (STAND), and the Texas Nuclear Waste Task Force petitioned the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to conduct a public health assessment of Pantex Plant; however, because of the proposed listing, ATSDR was already mandated to conduct a public health assessment of the site. The site was subsequently officially added to the NPL in May 1994.”

The summary and full text of the ATSDR's report may be obtained from the Internet website http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov:80/HAC/PHA/pantex/pan_toc.html.

Radiological and chemical sampling results obtained since this study confirm the findings of the ATSDR report.

August 2010

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