

FINAL

**Guidance for Evaluating Soil Vapor Intrusion
in the State of New York**

October 2006

Prepared by:



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Bureau of Environmental Exposure Investigation

Soil Vapor Intrusion Guidance Release History

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New York State Departments of Health and Environmental Conservation — Web Sites on Soil Vapor Intrusion

This guidance, policy documents, training documents, fact sheets, etc. are available to the public on the following web sites:

New York State Department of Health
http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/indoors/vapor_intrusion

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
<http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/der/guidance/vapor/index.html>

As new information becomes available (e.g., revisions or amendments to the guidance, new fact sheets, etc.), these web sites will be updated accordingly.

Preface

This guidance has been prepared by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) in consultation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) — collectively referred to as "the State" throughout this document. It is intended as general guidance for parties evaluating soil vapor intrusion in the State of New York. The guidance is not a regulation, rule or requirement.

The guidance describes the State's methodology for evaluating soil vapor intrusion at a site. It reflects our experience in conducting soil vapor intrusion investigations and presents a reasonable and practical approach to identifying and addressing current and potential human exposures to contaminated subsurface vapors associated with known or suspected volatile chemical contamination. The approach presented is analogous to the approach taken when investigating contamination in other environmental media (e.g., groundwater, soil, etc.) and addressing corresponding exposure concerns.

The guidance is organized into five sections:

Section 1 introduces the concept of soil vapor intrusion, associated human exposure issues, factors affecting soil vapor intrusion, factors affecting indoor air quality, and the general approach recommended to evaluating vapor intrusion;

Section 2 provides guidance on collecting appropriate and relevant data that can be used to identify current or potential human exposures;

Section 3 discusses how the investigation data are evaluated, recommends actions based on the evaluation, and presents tools that are used when determining appropriate actions to address exposures;

Section 4 provides an overview of soil vapor intrusion mitigation methods and basic recommendations pertaining to their selection for use, installation and design, post-mitigation testing, operation, maintenance and monitoring, termination of operation, and annual certification; and

Section 5 describes outreach techniques commonly used to inform the community about soil vapor intrusion issues.

The State recommends that the guidance be considered anywhere soil vapor intrusion is evaluated in the State of New York — whether the evaluation is undertaken voluntarily by a corporation, a municipality, or private citizen, or whether it is performed under one of the State's environmental remediation programs.

PLEASE NOTE:

- While soil vapor intrusion can also occur with "naturally-occurring" subsurface gases (e.g., radon, methane and hydrogen sulfide), the document discusses soil vapor intrusion in terms of environmental contamination only.
- The guidance document addresses soil vapor intrusion. However, vapor intrusion can also occur through direct volatilization of contaminants from groundwater into indoor air. This can occur when, for example, a basement slab is in contact with contaminated groundwater, contaminated groundwater enters (floods) a basement or crawl space, or contaminated groundwater enters a sump pit drainage system. In such cases, volatile

chemicals can be transferred directly from groundwater to indoor air without the intervening contamination of soil vapor. Although exposures of this nature are not discussed in this guidance, they should be addressed on a site-specific and building-specific basis.

- Throughout the guidance references are made to specific brands of field equipment. These references are for discussion purposes only and are intended to be illustrative. They should not be interpreted as endorsements by the State of any one company or their products.

ACRONYMNS and ABBREVIATIONS

ASTM	American Society for Testing and Materials	OM&M	Operation, Maintenance and Monitoring
ATSDR	Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry	OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
BASE	Building Assessment and Survey Evaluation	OVM	Organic Vapor Monitor
BTSA	[NYSDOH] Bureau of Toxic Substance Assessment	PCBs	Polychlorinated Biphenyls
CME	Continuing Medical Education	PCE	Tetrachloroethene or Perchloroethylene
CSEMs	Case Studies in Environmental Medicine	PID	Photoionization Detector
DUSR	Data Usability Summary Report	QA/QC	Quality Assurance/Quality Control
ELAP	Environmental Laboratory Approval Program	RIOPA	Relationship of Indoor, Outdoor, and Personal Air
EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency	SF ₆	Sulfur Hexafluoride
GC	Gas Chromatograph	SSD	Sub-slab Depressurization System
HEI	Health Effects Institute	SIM	Selective Ion Monitoring
HVAC	Heating, Ventilating and Air-conditioning	SMD	Sub-Membrane Depressurization
mcg/m ³	micrograms per cubic meter	SVE	Soil Vapor Extraction
MeCl	Methylene Chloride	SVOCs	Semi-volatile Organic Compounds
MEK	Methyl Ethyl Ketone; 2-Butanone	TAL	Target Analyte List
MTBE	Methyl- <i>tert</i> -Butyl Ether	TCA	Trichloroethane
NAPL	Non-Aqueous Phase Liquid	TCDD	Tetrachlorodibenzo- <i>p</i> -Dioxin Equivalents
NYSDEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation	TCE	Trichloroethene
NYSDOH	New York State Department of Health	TCL	Target Compound List
		VOCs	Volatile Organic Compounds

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Soil vapor can become contaminated when chemicals evaporate from subsurface sources. Chemicals that can emit vapors are called "volatile chemicals." Volatile chemicals include volatile organic compounds (VOCs), some semi-volatile organic compounds (SVOCs), and some inorganic substances such as elemental mercury. Subsurface sources of volatile chemicals can include the following:

- a. groundwater or soil that contains volatile chemicals;
- b. non-aqueous phase liquid (NAPL);
- c. buried wastes; and
- d. underground storage tanks or drums.

If soil vapor is contaminated and enters a building, indoor air quality may be affected.

When contaminated vapors are present in the zone directly next to or under the foundation of a building, vapor intrusion is possible. Soil vapor can enter a building whether the building is old or new, or whether it is on a slab or has a crawl space or basement (Figure 1.1). However, the subsurface source of the contaminated vapor (e.g., contaminated soil or groundwater) does not need to be directly beneath a structure to contaminate the vapor immediately beneath the building's foundation (as suggested in Figure 1.1).

1.2 Soil vapor intrusion and human exposure

Humans can be exposed to contaminated soil vapor when the vapor is drawn into the building due to pressure differences [Section 1.1] and mixed with the indoor air. Inhalation is the primary route of exposure, or the manner in which the volatile chemicals, once in the indoor air, actually enter the body.

Both current and potential exposures are considered when evaluating soil vapor intrusion at sites (i.e., locations of suspected or known environmental contamination). *Current* exposures exist when vapor intrusion is documented in an occupied building. *Potential* exposures exist when volatile chemicals are present in the vapor phase beneath a building, but have not affected indoor air quality due to current site conditions. Potential exposures also exist when there is a chance that contaminated soil vapors may move beneath existing buildings not currently affected, when indoor air is affected but the building is currently unoccupied, or when there is a chance that new buildings can be built over existing subsurface vapor contamination.

Exposure to a volatile chemical due to vapor intrusion does not necessarily mean that health effects will occur. Whether or not a person experiences health effects depends on several factors, including the length of exposure (short-term or acute versus long-term or chronic), the amount of exposure (i.e., dose), the frequency of exposure, the toxicity of the volatile chemical and the individual's sensitivity to the chemical.

1.3 Factors affecting soil vapor migration and intrusion

Predicting the extent of soil vapor contamination from soil or groundwater contamination, as well as the potential for human exposure from soil vapor intrusion into buildings, is complicated by factors that can affect soil vapor migration and intrusion. For example, soil vapor contaminant plumes may not mimic groundwater contaminant plumes since different factors affect the migration pattern of each medium. In addition to the operation of HVAC systems, the operation of kitchen vents in restaurants or of elevators in office buildings may

induce pressure gradients that result in the migration of vapor-phase contaminants away from a groundwater source of vapors and toward these buildings. This is similar to when the pumping of production wells or water supply wells draws contaminated groundwater away from its natural flow path.

Factors that can affect soil vapor migration and intrusion generally fall into two categories: environmental and building factors. Examples of environmental factors are provided in Table 1.1, and examples of building factors in Table 1.2. These factors are considered when conducting an investigation of the soil vapor intrusion pathway [Section 2] and when evaluating the results [Section 3].

Table 1.1 Environmental factors that may affect soil vapor intrusion

Environmental Factor	Description
Soil conditions	Generally, dry, coarse-grained soils facilitate the migration of subsurface vapors and wet, fine-grained or highly organic soils retard migration.
Volatile chemical concentrations	The potential for vapor intrusion generally increases with increasing concentrations of volatile chemicals in groundwater or subsurface soils, as well as with the presence of NAPL.
Source location	The potential for vapor intrusion generally decreases with increasing distance between the subsurface source of vapor contamination and overlying buildings. For example, the potential for vapor intrusion associated with contaminated groundwater decreases with increasing depth to groundwater.
Groundwater conditions	<p>Volatile chemicals dissolved in groundwater may off-gas to the vadose zone from the surface of the water table. If contaminated groundwater is overlain by clean water (upper versus lower aquifer systems or significant downward groundwater gradients), then vapor phase migration or partitioning of the volatile chemicals is unlikely.</p> <p>Additionally, fluctuations in the groundwater table may result in contaminant smear zones. The "smear zone" is the area of subsurface soil contamination within the range of depths where the water table fluctuates. Chemicals floating on top of the water table, such as petroleum components, can sorb onto soils within this zone as the water table fluctuates. Sorption of chemicals can influence their gaseous and aqueous phase diffusion in the subsurface, and ultimately the rate at which they migrate.</p>
Surface confining layer	A surface confining layer (e.g., frost layer, pavement or buildings) may temporarily or permanently retard the migration of subsurface vapors to outdoor air. Confining layers can also prevent rainfall from reaching subsurface soils, creating relatively dry soils that further increase the potential for soil vapor migration.
Fractures in bedrock and/or tight clay soils	Fractures in bedrock and desiccation fractures in clay can increase the potential for vapor intrusion beyond that expected for the bulk, unfractured bedrock or clay matrix by facilitating vapor migration (in horizontal and vertical directions) and movement of contaminated groundwater along spaces between fractures.
Underground conduits	Underground conduits (e.g., sewer and utility lines, drains or tree roots, septic systems) with highly permeable bedding materials relative to native materials can serve as preferential pathways for vapor migration due to relatively low resistance to flow.
Weather conditions	Wind and barometric pressure changes and thermal differences between air and surrounding soils may induce pressure gradients that affect soil vapor intrusion.
Biodegradation processes	Depending upon environmental conditions (e.g., soil moisture, oxygen levels, pH, mineral nutrients, organic compounds, and temperature), the presence of appropriate microbial populations, and the degradability of the volatile chemical of concern, biodegradation in the subsurface may reduce the potential for vapor intrusion. For example, readily biodegradable chemicals in soil vapor may not migrate a significant distance from a source area while less degradable chemicals may travel farther.

Table 1.2 Building factors that may affect vapor intrusion

Building Factor	Description
Operation of HVAC systems, fireplaces, and mechanical equipment (e.g., clothes dryers or exhaust fans/vents)	Operation may create a pressure differential between the building or indoor air and the surrounding soil that induces or retards the migration of vapor-phase contaminants toward and into the building. Vapor intrusion can be enhanced as the air vented outside is replaced.
Heated building	When buildings are closed up and heated, a difference in temperature between the inside and outdoor air induces a stack effect, venting warm air from higher floors to the outside. Vapor intrusion can be enhanced as the air is replaced in the lower parts of the building.
Air exchange rates	The rate at which outdoor air replenishes indoor air may affect vapor migration into a building as well the indoor air quality. For example, newer construction is typically designed to limit the exchange of air with the outside environment. This may result in the accumulation of vapors within a building.
Foundation type	Earthen floors and fieldstone walls may serve as preferential pathways for vapor intrusion.
Foundation integrity	Expansion joints or cold joints, wall cracks, or block wall cavities may serve as preferential pathways for vapor intrusion.
Subsurface features that penetrate the building's foundation	Foundation perforations for subsurface features (e.g., electrical, gas, sewer or water utility pipes, sumps, and drains) may serve as a preferential pathway for vapor intrusion.

1.4 Factors affecting indoor air quality

Chemicals are a part of our everyday life. They are found in the household products we use and in items we bring into our homes. As such, chemicals are found in indoor air of homes not affected by intrusion of contaminated soil vapor. Examples of alternate sources of volatile chemicals in indoor air are given in Table 1.3. Similarly, volatile chemicals can be in the outdoor air that enters a home or place of business. Certain commercial and industrial facilities, such as gasoline stations and dry cleaners, and vehicle exhaust are examples of possible sources of volatile chemicals in outdoor air.

Commonly found concentrations of these chemicals in indoor and outdoor air are referred to as "background levels." These levels are generally determined from the results of samples collected in homes, offices and outdoor areas not known to be affected by external sources of volatile chemicals (for example, a home not known to be near a chemical spill, a hazardous waste site, a dry-cleaner, or a factory). Background sources of volatile chemicals are considered when conducting an investigation of the soil vapor intrusion pathway [Section 2] and when evaluating the results [Section 3].

Table 1.3 Alternate sources of volatile chemicals in indoor air

Source	Description
Outdoor air	Outdoor sources of pollution can affect indoor air quality due to the exchange of outdoor and indoor air in buildings through natural ventilation, mechanical ventilation or infiltration. Outdoor sources of volatile compounds include automobiles, lawn mowers, oil storage tanks, dry cleaners, gasoline stations, industrial facilities, etc.
Attached or underground garages	Volatile chemicals from sources stored in the garage (e.g., automobiles, lawn mowers, oil storage tanks, gasoline containers, etc.) can affect indoor air quality due to the exchange of air between the garage and indoor space.
Off-gassing	Volatile chemicals may off-gas from building materials (e.g., adhesives or caulk), furnishings (e.g., new carpets or furniture), recently dry-cleaned clothing, or areas (such as floors or walls) contaminated by historical use of volatile chemicals in a building. Volatile chemicals may also off-gas from contaminated groundwater that infiltrates into the basement (e.g., at a sump) or during the use of contaminated domestic well water (e.g., at a tap or in a shower).
Household products	Household products include, but are not limited to, cleaners, mothballs, cigarette smoke, paints, paint strippers and thinners, air fresheners, lubricants, glues, solvents, pesticides, fuel oil storage, and gasoline storage.
Occupant activities	For example, in non-residential settings, the use of volatile chemicals in industrial or commercial processes or in products used for building maintenance. In residential settings, the use of products containing volatile chemicals for hobbies (e.g., glues, paints, etc.) or home businesses. People working at industrial or commercial facilities where volatile chemicals are used may bring the chemicals into their home on their clothing.
Indoor emissions	These include, but are not limited to, combustion products from gas, oil and wood heating systems that are vented outside improperly, as well as emissions from industrial process equipment and operations.

1.5 General approach to evaluating soil vapor intrusion

Since no two sites are exactly alike, the approach to evaluating soil vapor intrusion is dependent upon site-specific conditions. A thorough understanding of the site, including its history of use, characteristics (e.g., geology, geography, identified environmental contamination, etc.) and potentially exposed populations, is used to develop an investigation plan. Existing information is reviewed to determine what data are available and what additional data should be collected (i.e., to guide the investigation). In addition, factors affecting soil vapor migration and intrusion [Section 1.3] and indoor air quality [Section 1.4] are also considered when both conducting an investigation [Section 2] and evaluating the results [Section 3].

This data gathering and review process should be repeated until each of the following questions can be answered:

- [1] Are subsurface vapors contaminated (i.e., soil vapor as defined in Section 1.1, including vapors located immediately beneath the foundation or slab of a building)? If so, what are the nature and extent of contamination? What is/are the source(s) of the contamination?
- [2] What are the current and potential exposures to contaminated subsurface vapors via soil vapor intrusion?
- [3] What actions, if any, should be taken to prevent or mitigate exposures related to soil vapor intrusion and to remediate subsurface vapor contamination?

When determining what actions, if any, are appropriate to mitigate current or prevent future human exposures, all information known about a site is considered (i.e., a "whole picture" approach is taken) because each site presents its own unique set of circumstances. This information includes, but is not limited to, the following: nature and extent of contamination in all environmental media, factors affecting vapor migration and intrusion, current and future site uses, off-site land uses, presence of alternate sources of volatile chemicals, and completed or proposed remedial actions.

Actions taken to minimize or prevent exposures typically do not preclude the site from being used for a desired purpose or from being developed. If appropriate, mitigation systems can be installed at existing buildings or installed during the construction of new buildings. In many cases, installation of mitigation systems on new buildings may be a prudent, proactive action. The costs associated with installing a system at the time of a building's construction are often considerably less than the costs associated with retrofitting a system to the building after construction is completed. Furthermore, in many parts of New York State, the mitigation system would also address concerns about human exposures to radon. To learn more about radon in New York State, please refer to the Radon: Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet in Appendix H or visit the NYSDOH's web site at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/radon/radonhom.htm> or contact the NYSDOH's Radon Program at 1-800-458-1158.

1.6 Conceptual site model

In accordance with the NYSDEC's *Draft DER-10 Technical Guidance for Site Investigation and Remediation* (NYSDEC 2002), subsurface vapors and soil vapor intrusion should be included in an overall conceptual model for the site. As described in the NYSDEC's technical guidance, a conceptual site model should be used to develop a general understanding of the site to evaluate potential risks to public health and the environment and to assist in identifying and setting priorities for the activities to be conducted at the site. The conceptual site model also identifies potential sources of contamination, types of contaminants and affected media, release mechanisms and potential contaminant pathways, and actual/potential human and environmental receptors.

The components of a conceptual site model specific to soil vapor intrusion are provided throughout Section 1 of the guidance. The general approach for evaluating soil vapor intrusion described in Section 1.5 is analogous to the development of a conceptual site model specific to soil vapor intrusion. For additional information about the use of conceptual site models in the investigation and remediation of sites or a description of the conceptual site model process, the reader is referred to the NYSDEC's technical guidance.

1.7 Applicability of guidance

This guidance should be considered anywhere soil vapor intrusion is evaluated in the State of New York, whether the evaluation is being undertaken voluntarily by a corporation, a municipality, or private citizen, or under one of the state's environmental remediation programs.

1.7.1 Residential and non-residential settings

The guidance should be followed in residential and non-residential settings where people may be exposed involuntarily to chemicals from soil vapor intrusion.

1.7.2 Chlorinated and non-chlorinated volatile chemical sites

The guidance should be used when evaluating soil vapor intrusion at chlorinated and non-chlorinated volatile chemical sites, including petroleum hydrocarbon sites and manufactured gas plant sites. While the likelihood for exposures related to soil vapor intrusion may differ between sites due to site-specific conditions and chemical-specific properties, the extent of volatile chemical contamination and the nature of the contamination, these factors should be considered when developing the conceptual site model and implementing an investigation plan (as discussed in Sections 1.5 and 1.6). For example, if the conceptual site model suggests that soil vapor intrusion is not a concern at a petroleum hydrocarbon site due to biodegradation, the work plan might include the measurement of select bioparameters (e.g., oxygen, carbon dioxide, methane, etc.), along with the petroleum hydrocarbons, at varying depths to demonstrate bioattenuation in the vadose. The work plan might include sub-slab vapor sampling as well to demonstrate that conditions beneath nearby buildings are also resulting in bioattenuation of the petroleum hydrocarbons.

1.7.3 Current, new and past remedial sites

As discussed in the NYSDEC's Program Policy *DER-13: Strategy for Prioritizing Vapor Intrusion Evaluations at Remedial Sites in New York* (NYSDEC 2006), the soil vapor intrusion pathway will be evaluated at all completed, current and future remedial sites New York State. This soil vapor intrusion guidance document complements the NYSDEC's policy by providing recommendations on how to evaluate soil vapor intrusion. The combined goal of the policy and guidance documents is to conduct soil vapor intrusion evaluations as efficiently and effectively as possible at all remedial sites in New York.

1.8 Updates to the guidance

The investigation, evaluation, mitigation and remediation of soil vapor are evolving disciplines and this guidance document will be updated periodically, as appropriate. The history of the document's release is provided on the inside of the cover page. In addition, changes to the document are noted in Appendix A. The current version of the document supercedes previous versions. The current version of the guidance is available on the NYSDOH's web site (http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/indoors/vapor_intrusion/) or by contacting the NYSDOH's Bureau of Environmental Exposure Investigation [see Contact Information on the inside of the cover page]. Revisions or amendments to the guidance will be posted on the NYSDOH's web site.