

Air quality monitoring at the former Bayer site, Hauxton, Cambridgeshire

The Health Protection Agency has produced the following assessment of emissions to air from the former Bayer site at Hauxton, Cambridgeshire.

May results - Non technical summary

The Health Protection Agency - Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards (CRCE) have reviewed the latest volatile organic compound (VOC) monitoring data collected at the Hauxton site perimeter between 15 April and 13 May 2010. This data has been considered in relation to potential toxicological effects from emissions due to the remediation work at the former Bayer site in Hauxton.

It is important to make a distinction between concerns about odour and any toxicological effect from exposure to chemicals. The role of HPA is to produce interpretation of results in relation to potential toxicological effects. Some background information about odours has been provided as odours appear to be the main concern to members of the public, but the monitoring results are not relevant to the assessment of odours. The human nose is very sensitive to odours, and many substances that are perceived as odorous are usually present at levels below which there is a direct toxicological effect. Odours can cause nuisance amongst the population possibly leading to stress and anxiety. Some people may experience symptoms such as nausea, headaches or dizziness, as a reaction to odours even when the substances that cause those smells are themselves not harmful to health. It cannot be excluded that some resident's symptoms may be as a result of their reaction to particular odours and all efforts should be taken to reduce off-site odours to as low as is reasonably practical.

The data provided to the HPA have been compared to available health based air quality guidelines and standards or assessment levels for the individual VOCs identified. Where the concentrations in air are shown to be lower than appropriate standards it may be assessed that the risk to health is minimal.

The latest results do not alter the HPA assessment that VOC emissions from the site are not of concern toxicologically and are therefore very unlikely to pose a risk to the nearby residents short or long term health.