Mather Environmental Cleanup FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is the water on the Mather property safe to drink and where does it come from?

A: Yes, the water is safe to drink. The water provider for Independence Housing and the rest of the Mather property is the Sacramento County Water Agency. This water meets the rigorous standards set by the California Department of Health Services. The groundwater pollution issues at Mather have no impact on the quality of drinking water provided through the water system there.

Q: How can you be sure the water is safe to drink?

A: The contaminated water is not used for drinking water. Wells providing drinking water are tested regularly, and annual water quality reports are provided to water customers as required by law. In addition, the Air Force samples the water from many drinking water wells. Many of the more than 600 Air Force monitoring wells track and measure contamination and ensure that the contaminated water doesn't impact drinking water supplies.

Q: What about the soil? Is it hazardous?

A: Since the cleanup began in the 1980s, the Air Force has gathered extensive information about the locations where hazardous waste was dumped, leaked or spilled. The few locations where fuel tanks leaked in the housing area (at two gas stations and a generator under the water tower) have been cleaned up. The other contaminated sites at Mather are in former industrial areas, where cleanup actions have been completed or are in progress, and are not in or near housing.

Q: Can I dig in my yard?

A: As in any community, you must first obtain permission to be sure you don't damage underground utility lines and pipelines, including those associated with the Air Force's Mather cleanup monitoring program. Contact the dig alert phone number (800-227-2600) 48 hours before digging in your yard.

Q: If I live on Mather, can I plant a garden? Is it safe to grow vegetables or work in the soil?

A: It's safe to plant a garden and grow vegetables. There are no restrictions within the yards of homes built on the former base, such as yours. The only possible concern is lead from lead-based paint that was on the former military houses. However, this is no different from any other site that has or had buildings built prior to 1978.

Q: I've heard a lot about perchlorate in the region. Can you tell me if it's a problem at Mather and where it is?

A: There are a couple of areas where perchlorate from sources east of Mather has traveled over time into the groundwater underneath Mather. The locations and depths of these underground plumes are well understood and the monitoring and cleanup programs are conducted by the responsible parties under the regulatory oversight of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Q: I'm curious about the piping, equipment and signs for cleanup systems I see when I drive around Mather. What is coming out of these and is it dangerous to breathe?

A: The vapors released are mostly water vapor, but may contain low concentrations of environmental contaminants. These low concentrations do not pose a significant health threat and are also released from exhaust stacks that carry the vapors away from ground level. There are no special problems associated with the air at Mather.

Q: The cleanup at Mather seems to be going on for a very long time. Why?

A: Even using the best available technology, the removal of contaminants in the soil and groundwater is a time-consuming process. The cleanup process is managed to methodically achieve cleanup while avoiding unneeded expense to taxpayers, and occurs with oversight by numerous regulatory agencies to protect human health and the environment.

Q: When did the Air Force start the cleanup and when will they be finished?

A: The Air Force began cleaning up Mather in the 1980s. As of 2009 all cleanup systems were in place working to remove contamination. The Air Force will continue with the cleanup until the job is done. Most soil vapor sites are expected to be cleaned by about 2015, but groundwater cleanup may continue in some areas until at least 2050. Landfill monitoring will extend indefinitely.

Q: Where can I get more information about the cleanup?

A: You can look on our website: **www.afrpa.hq.af.mil**. Then, in right-hand column, select "BRAC Bases" from the pull down menu. Choose "Mather AFB, California". To get on our mailing list, email **afrpa.pa@us.af.mil** or phone **(916) 643-6420 x257**.

Q: Is my home or business affected by the ongoing cleanup operation?

A: There is no exposure to contamination at any home or business, but some homes and businesses are located close to cleanup equipment such as wells or piping.

Dont forget to visit us at

www.afrpa.hq.af.mil

or for Mather AFB

http://www.safie.hq.af.mil/afrpa/legacybrac/mather/index.asp