

# McClellan Environmental Cleanup

# FAQ

## Frequently Asked Questions



**Q:** [Is the water at McClellan safe to drink and where does it come from?](#)

**A:** Yes, the water is safe to drink. All of the water at McClellan comes from Sacramento Suburban Water District, the water purveyor for McClellan and areas to the east and south. Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District supplies water to the area northwest of McClellan, and City of Sacramento supplies the communities southwest of McClellan. All these purveyors provide water that meets the rigorous standards set by the California Department of Health Services. The groundwater pollution issues at McClellan have no impact on the quality of drinking water provided through the water systems in the area.

**Q:** [How can you be sure the water is safe to drink?](#)

**A:** The contaminated water is not used for drinking water. The water purveyors in the area get their water from either surface water or from groundwater much deeper than the area of contamination from McClellan. Drinking water supplies are tested regularly, and annual water quality reports are provided to water customers as required by law. In addition, the Air Force's rigorous monitoring of its groundwater cleanup program ensures that contaminated water doesn't impact drinking water supplies. Water quality monitoring reports are available on each purveyor's web page:

**Sacramento Suburban Water District:** [www.sswd.org](http://www.sswd.org)

**Rio Linda/Elverta Community Water District:** <http://www.rlecwd.com>

**City of Sacramento:** <http://www.cityofsacramento.org/utilities/water/>

**Q:** [I work at McClellan and there are wells in our parking lot. Does this mean we're more at risk?](#)

**A:** No. Those wells are either monitoring wells or extraction wells that are part of the groundwater cleanup program. Water from these wells is not part of the drinking water supply and the presence of these wells does not indicate any risk to humans or the environment above the groundwater. Extraction wells on the base pump contaminated groundwater to the groundwater treatment plant on the west side of the base. The Air Force pulls water samples from the monitoring wells throughout the year to monitor the effectiveness of the groundwater cleanup program.

**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 disposed, leaked, or spilled. The contaminated sites at McClellan are in former industrial areas, where cleanup actions have been completed or are in progress, and are not in or near housing. Activities at these sites are carefully monitored to ensure contaminants are not disturbed until a cleanup remedy is in place.

**Q:** [I live at McClellan, can I dig in my yard?](#)

**A:** All the housing areas at McClellan have been transferred to McClellan Park after extensive investigations determined that the areas are safe for residential uses. As McClellan Park is the property owner, any digging must be approved by McClellan Park in advance. This ensures that you don't damage infrastructure on the property, such as underground utility lines and pipelines, including those associated with the Air Force's McClellan cleanup monitoring program. Contact your rental agent for more information.

**Q:** [If I live at McClellan, can I plant a garden? Is it safe to grow vegetables or work in the soil?](#)

**A:** Yes, It is safe to plant a garden and grow vegetables. The only possible concern is lead from chips of lead-based paint that has fallen from the walls of the former military houses. However, this is no different from any other site that has or had buildings built prior to 1978, when the use of lead-based paint was common. While it is safe to plant a garden and grow vegetables, McClellan Park, the owner of all housing on the former base, may have restrictions for other reasons. Check your lease or contact your rental agent for more information.

**Q:** [When I drive around McClellan, I see signs for cleanup systems and I see piping and equipment releasing vapor into the air. 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 acceptable under a discharge permit from Air Resources Control Board. The exhaust stacks carry the vapors away from ground level. The cleanup efforts at McClellan do not make the air at McClellan dangerous or unhealthy in any way.

**Q:** [The cleanup at McClellan seems to be going on for a very long time. Why?](#)

**A:** Even using the best available cleanup technologies, the removal of contaminants in the soil and groundwater is a time-consuming process. Before the cleanup can even begin, the nature and full extent of the contamination must be fully understood. This is a very time-consuming investigative process with numerous reviews from the regulatory oversight agencies to ensure that nothing is overlooked. The cleanup process is carefully managed to methodically achieve cleanup while avoiding unneeded expense to taxpayers. Numerous regulatory agencies closely oversee this cleanup process to ensure protection of human health and the environment.

**Q:** [What happens to McClellan after cleanup is finished?](#)

**A:** In 1995 the Base Realignment and Closure Commission announced that McClellan Air Force Base would be closed. The base subsequently closed in July 2001. Since that time, as parts of the base have been determined to be clean and suitable for transfer, those properties have been transferred primarily to McClellan Business Park for redevelopment. A few parcels have gone to other recipients including North Highlands Park and Recreation District, Twin Rivers School District, the Aerospace Museum of California, and Los Rios Community College District.

To facilitate more rapid and streamlined redevelopment, the Air Force, with the EPA, Sacramento County, the State of California, and McClellan Park, began a new property transfer and cleanup model called an early transfer with privatized cleanup. Under this model, the Air Force can transfer property and funds for its cleanup, before it is clean to McClellan Park. The U.S. EPA then becomes the lead agency for cleanup with responsibility for making cleanup decisions, and the cleanup actions are undertaken by McClellan Park within a schedule and design that fits the redevelopment plans for that parcel. This model applies only to cleanup of the first 15 feet of soil. The Air Force remains responsible for any deeper contamination and for cleanup of the groundwater, which is expected to continue in some spots for another 50 years. Landfill protection and monitoring will continue indefinitely.

- Q:** I've heard there's radioactive contamination at McClellan, and I've seen signs for it when I drive around. Is it safe?
- A:** Radioactive materials were used at McClellan during maintenance activities, storage of military commodities (such as luminescent dials and markers, night vision goggles, and aircraft components), and the operation of a series of radiological laboratories run by the Technical Operations Division. Maintenance activities included radium painting (radium 226) and removal and replacement of aircraft components containing cesium 137. Radium is the primary radioactive contaminant of concern at McClellan. Past disposal practices (that were standard at the time) and spills have resulted in radionuclide contamination in some parts of the former base. These areas are fenced off and marked with radiation warning signs to protect human health and the environment. Cleanup plans for most of these areas are in various stages of design and review and cleanup of all the radiation sites is expected to be completed by 2013. In the meantime, people and animals outside the barriers are safe from any exposure.
- Q:** What about the creeks? Are they safe to be in or to fish from?
- A:** Several creeks cross through McClellan and some of them have areas of low levels of contamination in the sediments in the creek beds. The Air Force is preparing the Ecological Sites Record of Decision (ROD) which will document the remedy for these areas and anticipates putting the remedies in place in 2012. It should be noted that all the creeks in McClellan carry primarily urban runoff of unknown water quality from the surrounding streets, parking lots, and landscaping.
- Q:** What is the big white tent on the west side of the base?
- A:** The white tent is a weatherization tent covering Confirmed Site 10 (CS10), a former landfill. In 2000, the Air Force began removing surface contamination at the site and investigating the contents of several buried drums. Upon the discovery of some vials and jars labeled plutonium in one drum, a time critical removal action began to excavate the landfill. The weatherization tent was placed over the area to enable crews to work on the site during adverse weather conditions. All drummed waste was sorted and sent offsite for disposal. More than 27,864 cubic yards of the most contaminated soil were transported offsite for disposal. The careful excavation of CS 10 provided helpful information about the materials that may be present in the other disposal pits, such as soil, debris, drums, and ash. A total of 23,409 cubic yards of contaminated soils remain stockpiled in a weatherization tent at CS 10, constructed prior to the excavation. The excavated pit remains open, pending final confirmation sampling, and the stockpiled soil will remain until a final remedy has been selected. The weatherization tent prevents the stockpiled soil from being disturbed by rain or other weather conditions, and there is a water recovery system that prevents storm water from ponding and entering the tent. The primary contaminants remaining at CS 10 within the stockpiled soil consist of arsenic, cadmium, lead, silver, and radium 226.
- Q:** Where can I get more information about the cleanup at McClellan?
- A:** Contact the Air Force Real Property Agency's McClellan Community Relations Office by calling (916) 643-1250, ext 232 or emailing [afrpa.west.pa@us.af.mil](mailto:afrpa.west.pa@us.af.mil).