

Ascon Huntington Beach Odors

November 2020

A safer, cleaner future for the community


Nothing is more important than the health and safety of the Huntington Beach community as we work together to finish the cleanup of the Ascon Landfill Site. We have listened and heard the concerns about odors shared by our neighbors. We are continuously reviewing and implementing additional odor control measures at the Ascon Site. We added new odor mitigation measures to our practices in 2019 and are committed to better managing odors as we prepare to complete the cleanup.

In 2015, the California Department of Toxic Substances (DTSC) approved a Final Remedial Action Plan (RAP) outlining cleanup activities for the Ascon Site. The remedial plan was approved following a rigorous, multi-year public review and a formal Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Since the latest cleanup work began in January 2019 and during prior field work since 2003, air monitoring onsite has shown that air quality has not posed a health risk and air quality data is safely below health-protective screening levels.

What can cause odor at the Ascon Site?

Odors can be caused by specific compounds and groups of compounds called chemical classes. We know that odors may be generated when disrupting soils during excavation work on portions of the Site. Everyone reacts to odors differently. Often, odors like those generated from disturbance of soils at Ascon are caused by a combination of compounds difficult to specifically distinguish.

Monitoring wind


We are continually monitoring onsite wind and weather conditions to understand the potential impacts on the community and our team. 

Once fieldwork resumes, if the wind speed onsite exceeds 15 mph (averaged over 15 minutes) or gusts exceed 25 mph, all excavation work stops until wind conditions improve.



Odor Assessment

To fulfill our commitment to better managing odors in future work and in response to community concerns, we are working on a comprehensive approach to identifying the odor-causing compounds. As part of that commitment, we conducted a technical odor assessment during the emergency northwest berm repair work in spring 2020. Prior fieldwork in 2019 indicated this is a more odorous area of the Site.

A professional odor panel is made up of **trained odor assessors who determine odor intensity, characterization and provide odor descriptions.** 

The purpose of the northwest berm odor assessment was to identify potentially odorous compounds in the soil and ambient air. As part of this odor assessment, we:

- ✓ Collected and screened soil core samples in the field for total volatile organic compounds (VOCs) using a photoionization detector (PID) to identify soils and waste materials with higher potential for odor
- ✓ Collected ambient air samples from upwind and downwind locations approximately 100 feet from the excavation areas
- ✓ Sent samples for laboratory analysis to identify compounds present above odor thresholds and review by a professional odor panel



Through the odor assessment, several compounds or chemical classes were identified as primary odor drivers in the northwest area of the Site:

- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)
- Aldehydes
- Reduced sulfur compounds
- Ammonia
- Methanol

These compounds and chemical classes can produce odors described as “petroleum,” “plastics,” “sulfur,” “chemical” and “decay,” and while they can generate odors in outdoor air, they were not at levels that can cause long-term health effects.

Air monitoring data collected to-date on the Site and in the surrounding neighborhood confirmed that, when odorous compounds have been identified, they have not been at levels that present a health risk to the community.



Ascon team collecting soil samples for northwest berm odor assessment

Odor Management

We understand that we need to do better when it comes to minimizing odors during field work. The north berm odor assessment also confirmed that, as a result of new practices and the application of products, we were able to successfully manage odor during this work. Better understanding of odor-causing compounds and where they occur on the Site will inform our overall strategy as we prepare to complete the cleanup.

Learn more about enhancements at the Ascon Site to help control odors at [Managing Odors at Ascon](#).

? Frequently asked questions

If I am smelling hazardous materials, how can my health not be impacted? Sensing an odor does not necessarily mean there is a health hazard. The odor threshold, the level at which a substance can be smelled, for many of the compounds at the Ascon Site is far lower than health-protective guidelines. An extensive air quality monitoring network is in place at Ascon to protect the community. While odors periodically have been detected in outdoor air, compounds have not been measured at levels that can cause long-term health effects.

Some of the chemicals of concern at Ascon are reported at levels below the threshold for human smell. What is it that we are smelling? Our recent odor assessment identified the following compounds and chemical classes at the northwest Site area as likely to cause odors:

- VOCs
- Aldehydes
- Reduced sulfur compounds
- Ammonia
- Methanol

These substances can generate odors in outdoor air because they have a low odor threshold easily detected by the human nose. However, they have not been measured at levels that cause long-term health effects.

Why weren't you monitoring for the compounds that are creating odor? The approved air quality monitoring program for Ascon was developed to be protective of human health, focusing on VOCs and metals present at the Site that may pose a potential health risk to nearby neighbors. Air quality monitoring onsite and in the community, including during the period preceding shutdown, has consistently shown that air quality data has been safely below health-protective screening levels. We are now adding further investigation to understand drivers of odor at the Site.

Want more information? Questions? Concerns?

To learn more about the Ascon cleanup, and to sign up for our weekly project update email newsletter, visit our website at Asconhb.com or call the Ascon Community Information Line at (714) 388-1825.