

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

May 17, 2004
March 2010 Update

1. Where is the Alaska Railroad Terminal Reserve Site (“Site”)?

The Site is located in the Ship Creek “bowl” southwest of Government Hill and Elmendorf Air Force Base. Ship Creek runs through the Site and empties into Knik Arm and Cook Inlet to the west.

2. How big is the Site and who owns it?

The Site is approximately 600 acres and is owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC). ARRC’s railroad operations occupy approximately half of the Site and the remainder of the Site is under lease to numerous other industrial and commercial businesses. The federal government owned and operated the Site from 1915 to 1985.

3. Why did the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency believe the Site poses a risk to human health and the environment?

Prior studies indicated that a number of industrial-related materials are present in some of the soils and shallow ground waters at the Site. Examples include petroleum products, industrial solvents, paint, thinner and lacquers, herbicides, batteries, contaminated and used oil, spent antifreeze, polychlorinated biphenyls, metals. These materials are regulated as hazardous substances and solid wastes under EPA regulations. EPA believed that past releases of these materials at the Site required further study to determine whether they pose a risk to human health or the environment.

4. What is the remedial investigation and feasibility study or RI/FS?

The remedial investigation (RI) determined the nature, extent, and magnitude of any contamination of soils, groundwater, surface water and fresh water sediments at the Site that might cause harm to human health or the environment. It was completed in 2008. The feasibility study (FS) will identify and evaluate site cleanup alternatives that will be considered by EPA for any cleanup action that may be needed.

5. Will the environmental problems at the Site affect my drinking water?

No. The Municipality of Anchorage water system obtains its water from wells several miles upgradient from the Site. Environmental conditions at the Site could not affect these wells. If EPA or ARRC determines that any groundwater at the Site is being used as a source of drinking water, that use will be investigated to determine whether it creates any risk to human health.

6. Is the contamination moving into Ship Creek?

No. The investigations focused on protecting Ship Creek and included sampling of creek sediments, surface water, and groundwater entering the creek. No contaminants at levels of concern to human health or the environment have been found in Ship Creek.

7. Is it safe to fish in Ship Creek? Are the fish safe to eat?

ARRC's extensive sampling program found no information indicating that it is unsafe to consume fish from Ship Creek. Even if contamination had been found, most fish caught in Ship Creek are adult salmon that return to Ship Creek from the ocean and do not feed in the Creek.

8. When will the Site be cleaned up and who is going to pay for it?

No decision has been made at EPA or ARRC that any Site cleanup will be needed. The RI/FS will be directed at answering this question, and identifying potential alternative methods for any cleanup that may be required. ARRC is responsible for completing the RI/FS under a consent order signed with EPA in 2004. ARRC, the federal government agencies who were former owners and operators at the Site, and other parties who have contributed to the release of contaminants at the Site are potentially responsible for carrying out or funding any remedial action that may be needed.

9. Who will decide whether the Site is cleaned up?

After ARRC completes the FS, EPA will establish cleanup requirements based upon human health and environmental risks that will take into account how the Site is being used and is likely to be used in the future, including recreational use of Ship Creek.

10. Where can I get more detailed information on the Site investigation?

The ARRC contact for more information is Corporate Communications Officer Stephenie Wheeler, (907) 265-2671. EPA's Community Involvement Officer is Andrea Lindsey, (206) 553-1896. Documents and periodic updates will appear on the ARRC website, www.alaskarailroad.com.

11. What input will the neighboring community have in the cleanup process?

EPA and ARRC will keep the public informed regarding the progress of the RI/FS through web sites and periodic public notices and mailings. Both EPA and ARRC also have public information officers appointed to communicate information about the Site and respond to inquiries throughout the process until the Site investigation is completed.

12. Has ARRC been able to recover any money from the previous owner of the property, the federal government?

A legal action was filed against the United States in federal court at the end of December, 2009, as part of the negotiated settlement between ARRC and the U.S. for a share of the site investigation costs based on the original (and much longer) ownership of the property. This was not a hostile event, it was necessary in order to file settlement documents for court approval. This was all done within just a few days and on February 17, 2010, ARRC received the agreed payment of \$4.2 million from the U.S.