



Beltsville Agricultural Research Center

What You Need to Know

Site Location

The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) is over 6500 acres and located in Prince George's County, Maryland. It lies north of the Capital Beltway, between Interstate 95 and Route 295 (the Anacostia Freeway).

Site History

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has owned and operated the research park since it purchased a 475-acre farm in 1910. The facility has since expanded to its present size of over 6500 acres. Waste disposal activities have included landfills, disposal pits, open burning, etc. Wastes have included construction debris, laboratory waste, radioactive isotopes, scintillation tubes and biodegradable plant material. The disposal activities have contaminated soil, groundwater and surface water with hazardous chemicals.

Environmental Investigations and Actions

In 1994, BARC was placed on the National Priorities List (NPL). The listing included contamination in a four-acre site (Biodegradable Site) where biodegradable material was disposed from 1940 to 1975. In 1994, the Biodegradable Site property was transferred from BARC to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) for use as a train yard for the Green Line.

In 1998, BARC entered into a Federal Facility Agreement (FFA) with the EPA, as required by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Because of BARC's large size and complexity, BARC undertook an extensive review to identify all potential Areas of Concern (AOCs). This review included the review of historical aerial photos dating from the 1930s and a detailed field reconnaissance of all potential AOCs. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to all BARC employees. Interviews were then conducted with employees to gain additional insights. After additional investigations, the number of AOCs was reduced.

Several sites then continued to the Remedial Investigation (RI) phase, which is a much more thorough investigation to determine the nature and extent of contamination, and evaluate the potential risks that any contaminants may pose to human health and the environment.

Cleanup actions have included several removal actions to address immediate threats to human health and the environment. Removal actions between 1993 and 2011 included the off-site disposal of 70,000 tons of waste from an on-site landfill, and the cleanup of polychlorinated biphenyl compounds (PCBs) and pesticide-contaminated soils. Several other sites are under investigation and may be subject to further removal actions.



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The significant sites identified at BARC include:

The Biodegradable Site (BARC 6) is a 4-acre landfill used until the mid-1970s for disposal of construction debris, laboratory waste, and biodegradable plant material. This site is now part of the train yard for the WMATA Green Line train yard. In 1993, a removal action resulted in 70,000 cubic yards of landfill material removed and replaced with clean backfill.

The College Park Landfill (BARC 22) is a 30-acre landfill, active from 1954 to 1978. It was operated by BARC, the City of College Park, and the City of Greenbelt for disposal of residential wastes, construction debris, and chemical wastes from greenhouses in BARC.

The Chemical Disposal Pits (BARC 12) were initially identified for a PA/SI report in 1991. In historical aerial photography, the site was identified as an open burning/disposal area as early as 1943. Chemical disposal in an estimated 100 pits, measuring about 1,200 square feet each, began in 1965. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the USDA conducted a pilot sludge composting operation in this area. Site characterization sampling has identified volatile organic compounds, metals, and pesticides as contaminants of concern.

The Beaver Dam Road Landfill (BARC 27) was identified in the 1991 PA/SI as a 3.5-acre landfill used to dispose of construction rubble, furniture and other debris as early as 1943. Landfill operations ceased in 1990 and groundwater monitoring wells were installed for landfill permit requirements. Closure activities at the site included the construction of a clay cap with a geosynthetic liner underneath. Groundwater sampling at the 4 monitoring wells as well as surface water sampling (Beaver Dam Creek and a tributary) showed elevated concentrations of volatile organic compounds and metals.

The Low-Level Radiation Burial Site (BARC 18) is an inactive 1.5-acre landfill used from the late 1940s to 1987. Radioactive isotopes, scintillation tubes, metals, glass, plastic, and animal waste were disposed at the site. BARC records indicate that a total of fifty 10x12x10 feet deep pits were dug and five feet of clean backfill to grade covered the debris. Contamination in groundwater includes chloroform, radium 226/228, and Carbon-14.

Current Status/Planned or Potential Future Action

The USDA works with EPA to address environmental concerns at the facility. The USDA has conducted several cleanup actions at the facility. In addition, investigations continue for several sites.