

**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

Area 3C, Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London, SW1P 3JR



**Telephone** 08459 33 55 77

**Website** [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

Mr Gary Jones

Our ref: RFI 5133  
Your ref: 138046-65961b6d

10 December 2012

Dear Mr Jones

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: SAFETY GUIDELINES, REGULATIONS, SCALES OR LEVELS WHICH DEFRA USES FOR DEEMING WHAT IS NORMAL AND WHAT IS DANGEROUS WHEN TESTING FOR CHEMICALS OR CONTAMINANTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT**

Thank you for your request for information about safety guideline levels for testing chemicals or contaminants in the environment which we received on 13 November. We have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs). I am responding to your request in respect of contaminants in soil. I understand you have now received a response from water colleagues and will also receive a response from colleagues in air quality.

The information that you have requested is available from the Environment Agency.  
<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/33714.aspx>

The process of looking for and cleaning up contaminated land is regulated under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990 and supporting Statutory Guidance. Further information on the contaminated land regime in England can be accessed here:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/land/>

The duty to look for contaminated land and, where it is found, to clean it up rests with Local Authorities. The approach taken to decide whether a site poses a significant possibility of significant harm to human health and/or the environment (as prescribed in the Act) is based on risk rather than levels of exceedence of contaminants found in soil. This is because there are a number of uncertainties and necessary assumptions made around the potential for harm from contaminated soil. Before a decision can be made on whether a site is contaminated under Part 2A of the EPA 1990, Local Authorities as Regulators must first establish the prescence of a contaminant/pathway/receptor linkage before carrying out a series of risk assessments. One of the tools that professionals use to help them assess the risk to human health from long term exposure to contaminants in soil are known as Soil

Guideline Values (SGVs). SGVs are available for a number (but not all) contaminants and are set at a level that is considered minimal risk. SGVs are therefore a useful tool for screening out sites from further risk assessment.

I attach an annex giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service that you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Natalie Holehouse

**Email**        [natalie.holehouse@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:natalie.holehouse@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Annex A**

### **Complaints**

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Mike Kaye, Head of Information Standards, Area 1B, Ergon House, Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 2AL (email: [requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk)) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF