

South East Health Unit

formerly



Date: September 10, 2025

To: Residents of Adley Drive, Brockville, Ontario

From: South East Health Unit – Environmental Health Program

Subject: Important Health Information – Chemical Vapours Detected Outdoors from Creosote Rail Ties

Dear Residents:

The South East Health Unit (SEHU) and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks (MECP) are advising residents on Adley Drive that **air testing has detected chemical vapours** around the storage point of the creosote rail ties north of Adley Drive. These chemicals, known as **volatile organic compounds (VOCs)**, can pose health risks. MECP has required these rail ties to be removed in the coming weeks.

What was found?

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks (MECP) conducted a site visit on August 18, 2025 and found that the odour of creosote was detected on Adley Drive. Air quality testing was conducted by the MECP about 50 feet from the pile of rail ties and the presence of VOCs was detected using a hand held meter. It is important to note that this type of testing only provides information about a **specific point in time and location**. VOC levels can fluctuate due to environmental effects such as wind direction.

What is creosote?

Creosote is a general term for different oily liquids, with the most common variant being coal-tar creosote which is used as a heavy-duty wood preservative to protect rail ties against fungi, insects and other pests. It contains a number of chemicals, including VOCs that can vaporize and travel through the air.

How can I be exposed to creosotes from the rail ties?

Creosote exposure may occur when breathing it in (inhalation), eating it (ingestion), or touching it (skin contact). Potential exposure to residents on Adley Drive would only be from inhalation, with exposure being intermittent over the last three to four months.

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What are the health effects of creosotes exposure?

Health effects from inhalation exposure over a period of several months can include irritation of the nose and throat, respiratory irritation (cough, shortness of breath), and other effects (headache, nausea, light-headedness). Children, pregnant people, and the elderly may be at higher risk of developing health effects following prolonged exposure. These health effects are expected to resolve once the exposure stops (the creosote is removed, or the person leaves the area). Although creosote exposure can also increase the risk of other health effects (for example, skin contact can cause sun sensitivity and sores; ingestion can cause organ damage), these effects would not be expected from inhalation exposures. Long-term, permanent health effects and increased risk of cancer are linked only to exposures occurring over a period of several years.

What Residents Can Do

The following measures may help to reduce potential exposure:

- **Close windows** to reduce outdoor air entering into your home.
- If your **home's ventilation system** has a filter, follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding what filters are to be used and how frequently they are to be changed. Increase the ventilation rate and use a filter that can remove VOCs (e.g. activated carbon), if possible.
- Use a **portable air purifier** with a HEPA and activated carbon filter, if available.
- **Avoid spending long periods of time outside when you smell an odour of creosote.**
- To reduce your **overall exposures to VOCs in the home**, avoid smoking in the home and delay using paints, paint strippers, and other sources of VOCs until the ties are removed.
- **Report any symptoms or health concerns** to your healthcare provider.

We want to assure you that MECP and SEHU are working together to ensure **appropriate risk management measures** are implemented, including the removal of the rail ties in the coming weeks.

For questions or concerns about the information above, please contact:

South East Health Unit – Environmental Health Division

Phone: 613-345-5685 ext. 2308

Sincerely,



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