

## Meredith Wood Preserving March 31, 2005

### Introduction

In 2003, a resident living near the Meredith site in Fulton County, Georgia, submitted a request for a public health assessment to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to determine whether exposure to emissions and odors from the facility might be causing or exacerbating neighbors' health problems. The resident stated that odors from the facility occurred frequently, and that these odors cause breathing problems, nausea, and headaches. There is also a concern about whether soil and surface water contamination exist on and near the site. In addition, the resident indicated that sensitive populations (elderly) resided close to the site.

Under a cooperative agreement with ATSDR, GDPH conducted an environmental health education needs assessment to respond to the resident's concerns.

### Site Description and History

Meredith is located on Lawrence Street in East Point, Fulton County, Georgia. The site consists of a building structure and several acres of treated wood poles distributed around the site in neat piles. Beyond wooded private land to the south, Meredith is approximately one-quarter mile from the closest residence, an apartment building. The facility is adjacent to several private industrial properties to the east. It is bordered to the north by an asphalt plant, and to the west by landscaped private land with no public access.

Meredith is a wood preserving facility that has been operating since 1921. Today, the company's primary business is manufacturing and supplying creosote and pentachlorophenol treated wood poles to a variety of communication companies, electric utilities, and municipalities throughout the southeast and northeast United States.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GEPD) issued an operating permit to this facility in 1980, and compliance inspections are routinely conducted by GEPD. Several complaints have been received from the community about odors from the site. A few members of the community have reported on occasion, visible emissions above the site in the early morning. The odors

have primarily been identified by GEPD as originating from treated wood stored on-site, and to a lesser extent, from the manufacturing processes at the facility. The approved and permitted process of treating wood with creosote often produces a very pungent and distinct odor that can vary widely in intensity with hourly to seasonal changes. GEPD has responded to odor complaints with spot inspections, and no violations of the permit to date are considered a source of increased odors.

In 2003, GDPH provided ATSDR with a draft Scoping Report that categorized this site as an **indeterminate public health hazard** to nearby residents, Meredith workers, and adjacent private industry employees because sufficient air emissions data and community-specific health outcome data are not available to determine whether the site has had an adverse impact on human health.

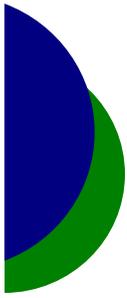
### Gathering Community Concerns

During fall 2003, GDPH developed a community survey to gather information about residents' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, practices, behaviors, and concerns about odors from the facility. From January-March 2004, the survey was distributed to residents living within 1-mile of the Meredith site. The survey was distributed and collected by community members and GDPH staff who canvassed the neighborhoods. Beginning in March 2004, GDPH staff entered the survey responses into a database and analyzed the results.

In addition to the survey, community concerns were gathered through the interviews with residents, local officials, and government agency staff. Local media coverage, neighborhood associations and community meetings, a community petition, and a protest at the site organized by residents also provided forums to assess community health education needs.

### Results

Over the three-month collection period, GDPH collected 133 surveys for a 27% return rate. The majority of respondents reported they smelled odors for more than one year to more than five years. There was no difference in odor reporting for residents living more than



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or less than two years in the community, however, more respondents reporting having lived in the community greater than two years did report odors. Proximity to Meredith did not increase one's chance of reporting odors from Meredith.

**Conclusions**

- The community requests education about respiratory health effects of odors.
- The community requests more information about the potential health effects from exposure to chemicals used to treat wood at Meredith.

**Recommendations**

An education program should be developed to address the potential health effects from exposure to chemicals used to treat wood at Meredith, exacerbation of existing respiratory conditions, and the physiological effects of odors.