



# Smear Zone Contamination

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This fact sheet describes how the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) evaluates residual contamination in the smear zone when reviewing requests for case closure. Sites closed under NR 726, Wis. Adm. Code, with residual soil contamination above standards are required to be included on the GIS Registry (to see the Registry, please click on [dnr.wi.gov/topic/Brownfields/rrsm.html](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Brownfields/rrsm.html)).

**The smear zone is the area where free product occurred in the soil and was then smeared across the soil when the water table fluctuated between historic high and low water table elevations.** It is fairly common when responsible parties request case closure approval to have residual contamination in the smear zone. Since closed sites that have residual soil contamination above standards must be included in the GIS Registry, it's important to know whether geologic material in the smear zone is defined as soil.

Materials within the smear zone are soil, regardless of the degree of saturation at the time that the closure request is made. The definition of "soil" in ch. NR 700, Wis. Adm. Code, applies to material in the smear zone that is sometimes saturated and sometimes unsaturated – the definition is not limited to material that is always unsaturated. Sites that are closed with residual contamination in the smear zone, including all nearby affected properties, must be included in the GIS Registry when residual contamination is above applicable NR 720 soil standards. Including these sites in the GIS Registry ensures that the public is notified through the Registry about the greatest concentrations of residual contamination, which are generally found in the smear zone.

Since contamination is common in the smear zone and often is the most concentrated in that area, definition of smear zone contamination is clearly required by chapter NR 716, Wis. Adm. Code, entitled *Site Investigation*. We do not anticipate that consultants should need to change their site investigation procedures in order to investigate the smear zone. Soil concentrations and low water table elevations will provide a better interpretation of the smear zone when used together. The scope of a site investigation should always be based on the specific conditions at a contaminated site.

**Remember, residual contamination in the smear zone generally means that the site will be shown in the GIS Registry.** Questions about this fact sheet may be addressed to Jane Lemcke, DNR, at 608-267-0554, or [jane.lemcke@wisconsin.gov](mailto:jane.lemcke@wisconsin.gov). To order this and any other publications, or to find out more information about the Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) Program, please check out our web site at [dnr.wi.gov/topic/Brownfields/](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Brownfields/).

This document contains information about certain state statutes and administrative rules but does not necessarily include all of the details found in the statutes and rules. Readers should consult the actual language of the statutes and rules to answer specific questions. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. This publication is available in alternative format upon request. Please call 608-267-3543 for more information.



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