

Groundwater Cleanup & Development

Several areas of groundwater at Lowry contain residual chemicals left from Air Force use that require cleanup. These areas, or plumes, are well-documented having been investigated for many years, and aggressive cleanup of the plumes is currently underway. While groundwater treatment is being performed, residential and commercial construction is allowed on the surface above the plumes, with some restrictions. This fact sheet provides general information to prospective buyers of homes above a plume. More detailed information and documents are available through the agency representatives listed below.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANUP AT LOWRY

Lowry was an Air Force technical training center from 1937 to 1994. Flight activities ended in 1965. In many ways, activities at Lowry were similar to other communities of the time. A coal-powered steam plant provided heat, gas stations fueled vehicles, municipal waste was taken to a dump and machine parts were cleaned with solvents. These activities were undertaken according to generally accepted practices then, but they caused environmental issues that must be addressed now. An environmental program has been underway at Lowry since before the base was closed in 1994. Extensive investigation has been performed, and cleanup will be completed where necessary. Remaining cleanup activities have been privatized through agreements between the Lowry Redevelopment Authority (LRA), U.S. Air Force, Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE) and Lowry Assumption, LLC (LAC).

GROUNDWATER CLEANUP

There are several groundwater plumes at Lowry containing solvents, primarily trichloroethylene (TCE). TCE is a common cleaning solvent that was used by the Air Force to clean metal parts. The largest of these plumes (the Main TCE Plume - see map on reverse) passes beneath parts of the Northwest and proposed East neighborhoods of Lowry. In 2004, LAC initiated aggressive treatment of the groundwater to meet state standards. Remediation conducted to date has been very effective, reducing concentrations by up to 70 percent in some areas within the first year with an average overall reduction of about 50 percent in the plumes. The groundwater ranges from approximately 10 to 24 feet below the current grade in the areas scheduled for residential construction. LAC will continue aggressive remediation and expects to complete active cleanup by 2012.

The groundwater at Lowry is not used for drinking, so the plume does not impact drinking water. The type of contaminants that are in the groundwater can possibly evaporate and move upward through the soil as a gas. Normally, when these gases reach the soil surface they mix with the outdoor air and get diluted to very low levels. However, if conditions are right, the gases can enter homes through openings such as cracks in foundations and crawl spaces.

CDPHE and other regulatory entities have expressed concern about possible health risks from long-term exposure to the gases trapped indoors (generally focusing on time frames measured up to 30 years). While the ongoing aggressive groundwater treatment is the best way to mitigate the long term concerns, CDPHE has required the installation of subslab depressurization systems in all new construction built over the groundwater plumes at Lowry to further reduce any potential exposures.

SUBSLAB DEPRESSURIZATION SYSTEMS



The subslab systems are similar to those used throughout metro Denver for radon mitigation, and will be installed by each home builder. These systems have proven to be highly effective at similar sites in Colorado and throughout the country in preventing both radon and other vapors from entering basements. The systems will create a low pressure zone beneath the house and vent to the outside.

Example of a Depressurization System

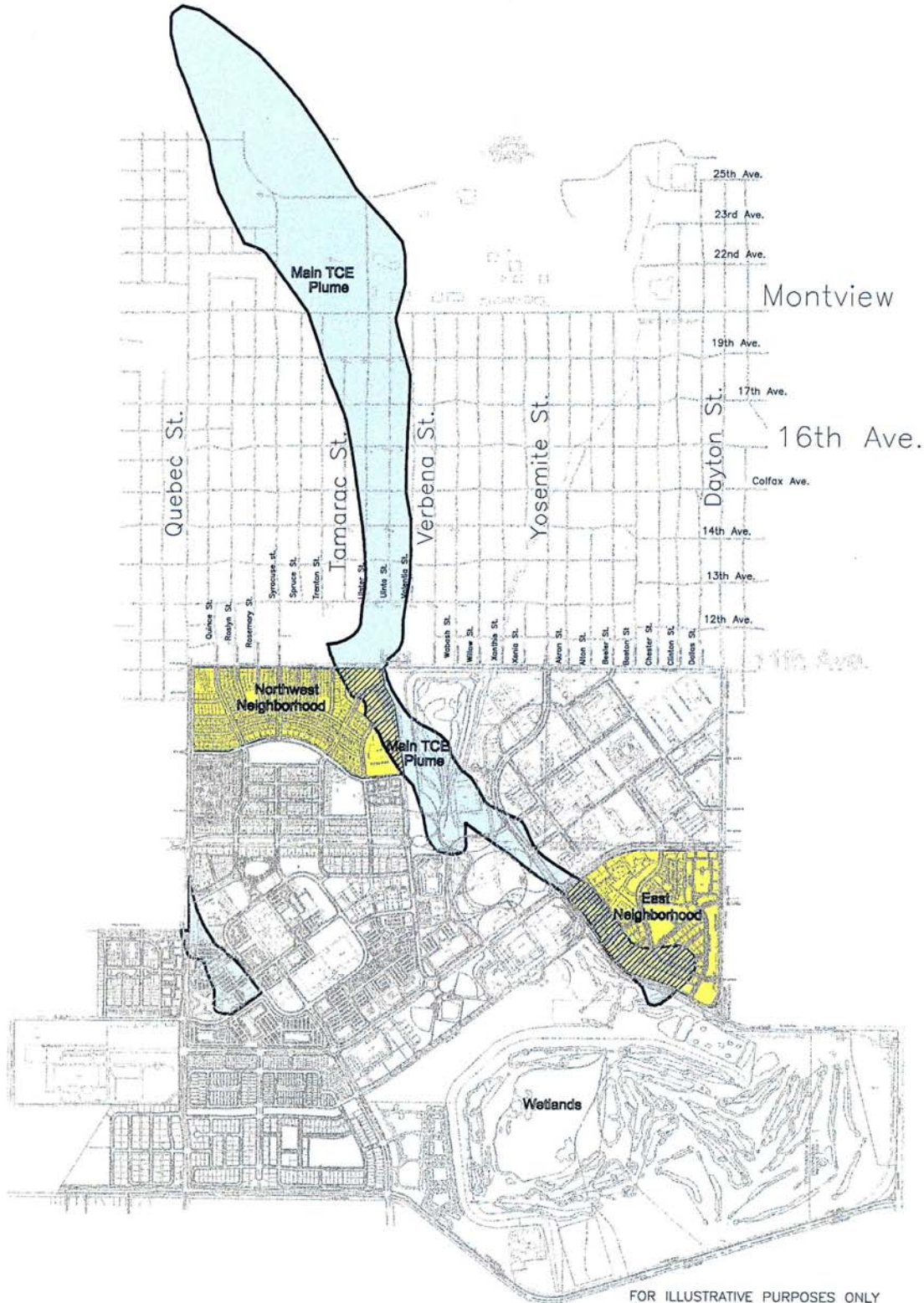
ENVIRONMENTAL COVENANT

The state requirement for a subslab depressurization system was recorded with the property deed by a covenant, which will appear with the title documents for those properties above the plumes. The covenant also has several other requirements such as no drilling of wells or use of the groundwater. The covenant requires notification to the State upon sale or lease of the property and upon application of any building permit. The covenant will run with the property until the groundwater remediation is complete and final approval has been issued by CDPHE. Similar requirements have been used in Colorado and other states in areas where development and environmental remediation occur simultaneously.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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