



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Good news and precautions concerning hurricane sediment**

**Galveston County and Cities** – In response to recent sediment testing by UTMB, Galveston County Health District officials are issuing general precautions that residents can take when dealing with the sediment left behind by Hurricane Ike. These are basic precautions in dealing with any environmental exposures whether before or after a hurricane.

The good news for Galveston residents is that none of these tests results revealed a major public health concern. In fact, none of the tests results exceeded state government levels requiring special actions for clean-up.

Immediately following Hurricane Ike many property owners across Galveston Island found their yards covered with sediment left behind by flood waters. Researchers from UTMB recently tested samples of the sediment, taken from various island locations, for heavy metals, Dioxins, furans, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's), asbestos, sulfur compounds, diesel range organics and semi volatile organics. There were little or no detectable levels of PCB's, Asbestos, Sulfur compounds, Diesel range organics or Semi volatile organics.

While arsenic levels were detected at somewhat increased levels, those levels are within the normal background levels in soil samples taken around the state according to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Researchers noted their test results show no significant differences with those tests previously performed by TCEQ.

“The fact that the levels are not a major health threat is good news; however, we still encourage residents to protect themselves when handling any unknown substance in the environment,” says Dr. Mark Guidry, Galveston County Health Authority. “Wear a protective mask to avoid inhaling dusts, and wear gloves and protective clothing to avoid skin exposure. Avoid bringing dust and contaminated items into your home. Always wash and cleanup prior to eating.”

By using common sense and washing regularly, exposure to contaminated soils can be reduced. Parents should make sure their children do not eat any dirt and try to keep children from putting their hands in their mouths if they have been playing in the dirt. If there are bare spots in a yard, consider adding a layer of new soil on top or grow grass or other vegetation over that area. Remove shoes before entering the home.

Guidry says, “The public health message remains the same. Protect yourself when exposed to potential environmental toxins such as lead or heavy metals. Prolonged and unprotected exposure to such material may have health effects which can be avoided by following the recommendations to reduce exposure.”

To date the Galveston County Health District has not received any reports from the medical community or general public of illness associated with exposure to sediment.

Testing for environmental toxins is not unusual after flooding events. Similar tests (and findings) occurred in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Much experience was gained in the interpretation of the results and its significance to public health.

For more information visit the Centers for Disease Control's National Center for Environmental Health [www.cdc.gov/nceh/](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/).