

What is a Soil Guideline Value - SGV?

DEFRA and the Environment Agency have published a series of Soil Guideline Values (SGVs). A SGV is a contaminant concentration in soil, below which no harm will occur i.e. a 'safe level'. If soil concentrations are above a SGV this indicates to a risk assessor that more assessment is required, or, intervention may be necessary to protect human health.

SGVs have been derived using the Contaminated Land Exposure Assessment model produced by the Environment Agency. The primary purpose of an SGV is to assist risk assessors in determining unacceptable chronic risks (long-term) to human health from land contamination.

SGVs take into account a number of different things such as:

- what the land is used for e.g. residential area, allotments, work premises
- who might be exposed to the soil e.g. children may be more susceptible to some chemicals than adults and women may be more susceptible to some chemicals than men.

SGVs for residential properties are based on the presumption that a young female child (0-6) i.e. potentially the most vulnerable group, uses the land. This means the SGVs are as cautious as they possibly can be.

SGV reports for individual contaminants are available to download from the Environment Agency web site. See www.environment-agency.gov.uk Where a SGV is not available for a contaminant then suitable site-specific criteria must be derived in accordance with Contaminated Land Report 9 "Collation of Toxicological Data and Intake Values for Humans".

In September 2005 DEFRA published a Contaminated Land Advisory Note - CLAN 02/05. This gave advice on the use of SGVs and warned against determining sites as contaminated land on the basis of 'minimal exceedences of SGVs' alone. DEFRA have set up a taskforce to investigate use of SGVs and produce further guidance on their use and applicability to determining whether land is contaminated as defined by Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In November 2006, DEFRA released a discussion paper 'Assessing Risks from Contamination – A Proportionate Approach. Soil Guideline Values: The Way Forward'.

The discussion paper is not Statutory Guidance. It presents emerging conclusions and issues relating to the production and use of soil guideline values (SGVs). It states that SGVs are intended as helpful tools for local authorities to use in determining that land is contaminated on the basis that there is a significant possibility of significant harm being caused.

We are currently awaiting further guidance on this. You are strongly advised to contact DEFRA or view the DEFRA to ascertain the current position on SGVs. See the 'What's new' section of the land quality pages of their web site:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/land/contaminated/index.htm>