

Land Quality Inspection Programme Frequently asked Questions



Why are we doing this where I live?

You live on a site which was historically used for industrial activity, for example, colliery and coke works, gas works and/or landfill. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 legally obliges us to inspect land in the county with a former industrial use.

This current inspection programme is part of our commitment to comply with the Act. We are currently surveying areas, which are most likely to have been affected by the industry that was once in the county. There are approximately 7,000 sites that have been identified on the council's database which meet our criteria for inspection.

What kind of pollution are we looking for?

Due to the nature of the former use of the land where you live, there are a wide range of pollutants that will be tested for which relate to the industry, its products and by-products.

What does the inspection involve?

In general, inspections involve carrying out soil sampling from garden areas, schools, allotments, and areas of public open space. Depending on the location, water sampling and air monitoring may also be carried out.

How long will the soil sampling in garden areas take, and do I have to be at home when the work is carried out?

Soil sampling in garden areas is a simple process. If you have signed and returned the access form that we sent you, the soil sampling will take only a couple of hours. We take a small amount of soil and send it off to be analysed. The results are then compared against government guidelines for soil composition in gardens. If you have agreed that we can access your land while you are out, then we will do so. We will leave a calling card to let you know the work has been done.

Can I refuse permission for the sampling to take place?

We hope that everyone involved will allow us access for the sampling to happen. If you have any concerns, please contact us on 03000 261152 or email us at landqualitysurvey@durham.gov.uk. Ultimately, because we have a legal duty to carry out the work, we have legal powers of entry to enable us to take the samples we need.

When will I find out the results?

Once we have got the soil and water samples we will need to send them to a laboratory for analysis. Air samples are monitored on site, and there may be a number of short visits over a few months to carry out the air monitoring following the main site inspection works. A report will be produced summarising our findings and making an assessment of the quality of the land. If samples were taken at your property, you will be notified by letter once this is complete. We hope to be able to let you know the findings about five months after the soil samples have been taken. Our website will be updated throughout and if samples were not taken at your property, you can view our findings by visiting www.durham.gov.uk/landquality.

What happens if further action is required?

We would need to undertake further sampling or worst case scenario, take action to clean the site to an acceptable standard and in accordance with government guidelines. In terms of the garden areas, cleaning up of the site would involve the affected soil being removed and replaced with good quality soil. Responsibility for costs depends on whether or not the original polluter is still in existence. If not, responsibility for the cost passes to the landowner. Some buildings insurance policies cover this type of work. We cannot predict any course of action until we know the full findings following the inspection.