

Elevated lead levels at Tarago – community update

This community update provides information on the progress of plans to remediate the rail corridor in Tarago.

The lead in the rail corridor is related to a historical mining load-out facility that was used to load and unload lead ore concentrate from the Woodlawn Mine in Tarago. The lead was then transported by rail to Newcastle and Port Kembla. The load-out facility operated from the mid-1980s before being demolished between 1997 and 2005.

Transport notified the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) of the elevated lead levels at Tarago in November 2019. We developed and have been implementing a Voluntary Management Proposal (VMP) to investigate and remediate the lead contamination in the Tarago Rail Corridor.

What have we done to date?

Transport has completed the first three stages of the VMP. This has involved a range of activities including:

- Investigations to understand the extent and locations of the contamination in the Tarago Rail Corridor and surrounding properties.
- Monitoring surface water and air quality over a 12 month period to assess the potential for impacts from contaminants in the rail corridor. The monitoring reports concluded that the risks to the community and environment were low across the monitoring period.
- Developing and implementing an Interim Action Plan to mitigate the potential risks to people and the environment. This involved installing warning signs, limiting the temporary stabling of trains on the loop line, spraying the rail corridor with a specialised treatment to reduce dust, removing contaminated sediment from the drains under the rail corridor and installing sediment controls.
- Completing routine inspections of the controls in the Interim Action Plan. This includes monthly inspections and monitoring the site after rainfall above 10 millimetres. Observations from the monitoring confirm the controls are effective.
- Developing a remediation action plan.

What is the plan to remediate the site?

Transport has assessed a number of remediation options for the site with the preferred option being excavation and off-site disposal of accessible lead impacted materials. The inaccessible materials, within the rail formation, will be safely managed in place. Several other options were also evaluated, however these were considered either technically unviable or didn't provide the best long term outcome for the community.

The details of the options evaluation process are presented in Section 11 of the Remedial Action Plan ([RAP](#)) - [click here to access the full report](#).

In summary, we considered four options for remediation:

- **Return of contaminated materials to the former Woodlawn mine** – this option was pursued as a viable option until the mine was placed into care and maintenance mode and could not accept the lead ore.
- **Onsite containment within the rail corridor contaminated site** – this option was investigated and eliminated due to site constraints and community feedback.
- **Onsite containment within rail corridor and away from Tarago township** – this option was investigated and a potential site identified. It was later eliminated due to the complexities around NSW environmental planning approvals.
- **Offsite treatment and disposal** – this option was investigated and became the preferred option.

The preferred option involves:

- Excavating contaminated soils from the rail corridor.
- Separating gravel and rail ballast from the contaminated material at an off-site location. This clean rock and rail ballast will be reused in the Country Rail Network.
- Chemically immobilising the contaminated materials and disposing of these immobilised materials at a suitable off-site location.
- Managing any inaccessible contamination at the site under a long-term environmental management plan that will be approved by the EPA.

Transport's preferred option has been to return any excavated contaminated materials to the Woodlawn Mine. The Mine went into care and maintenance before finalising the RAP. As a result, the RAP indicates an alternative off-site disposal location is preferred. Since the RAP was finalised, the Woodlawn Mine has re-started operations, and Transport will evaluate the possibility of returning lead impacted waste to the mine for burial.

Resolving the preferred option took longer than initially planned and has resulted in delays to visible action in the rail corridor. We regret that delay and apologise for not keeping the community informed of progress.

What are the project stages?

We are working with our contractor and government agencies to develop and implement the remediation action plan.

The stages of the project are outlined below.



When will the work be completed?

We have submitted an updated Voluntary Management Proposal (VMP) for the rail corridor to the EPA. The EPA approved the amended VMP on 9 March 2022 and published it on their website at <https://app.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/clm/docs/html/n20224403.htm>.

We expect to complete the planning, environmental approvals and procurement stage by late 2022. This is subject to obtaining the necessary third-party planning approvals such as an amended Environment Protection Licence and the Development Application.

At this stage, we expect to complete the remediation within 18 months of receiving the third-party planning approvals.

Transport apologises for the delays in the remediation program. We are working to complete the work safely and in line with EPA requirements. The health and safety of the community is our top priority in completing this important work.

How are we keeping the community safe while this work is happening?

Our primary focus is to ensure the safety of the community. We have developed the Tarago Lead Management Action Plan that has been in place since 2020. The objective of the plan is to minimise contamination exposure to human health and ecology.

We are committed to your safety and are continually monitoring and assessing all options on how we can do that best. Measures we have implemented to date include:

- Applying a polymer sealant to contaminated areas to reduce potential for contamination migration in dust and via surface water
- Controls for disturbing contaminated materials including notifying SafeWork NSW
- Monthly inspections and monitoring to assess and maintain the control measures.

Keeping the community informed

We will keep the community informed as our work progresses through community updates and our website. We are planning to hold community information sessions in August to seek input from the community and provide an update on the next steps.

The community sessions will be held face to face in the local area and using online technology.

Further information

We will provide updates as the work progresses. Information will also be provided on our website <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/tarago-rail-yards-lead-contamination>.

If you have any concerns or wish to speak to us at any time, please don't hesitate to contact us.

For more information about lead exposure, please see the [NSW Health website](#).

For more information about managing lead in the environment see the [EPA website](#).

Contact us

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact our project team:



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If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450** and ask them to call us on **1800 491 566**.