

Annex 4

Qualitative risk assessment

A4.1 Context

CIRIA RP599 Contaminated Land Risk Assessment Guide, provides a guide to good practice in assessing risks from contaminated land. This distinguishes between the processes of:

- **Risk estimation** – process of estimating risk that defined receptors will suffer harm.
- **Risk evaluation** – process of evaluating need for risk management action, with regard to magnitude of risks the level of uncertainty and, if remedial action is needed the objectives and broad costs and benefits.

At Phase 1 the **risk estimation** will take the form of a qualitative risk assessment, which will be entirely based on the conceptual model for each potential end-use of the site. Comments on level of uncertainty will also need to be included for each source-pathway-target linkage to allow the confidence in the assessed risks to be understood. The results of the qualitative risk assessment will allow the **risk evaluation** to be concisely described in the following chapters.

At Phase 2 (or later stages) the **risk estimation** will comprise a number of sequential steps all based on the conceptual model:

1. Interpretation of site investigation data with respect to relevant generic assessment criteria (Tier 1);
2. Interpretation of site investigation data with respect to site specific assessment criteria if appropriate (Tier 2);
3. Site specific qualitative risk assessment including input from Tier 1 and Tier 2 [this procedure].

Comments on level of uncertainty will also be required for through the interpretation of site investigation data and the qualitative risk assessment. The results of the qualitative risk assessment will allow the **risk evaluation** to be concisely described.

A4.2 Introduction

The following classification has been developed from DOE Guide to Risk Assessment and Risk Management for Environmental Protection and the Statutory Guidance on Contaminated Land (Defra September 2006). The methodology differs from that presented in Contaminated Land Risk Assessment, A Guide to Good Practice (CIRIA C552, 2001), particularly in terms of the definitions of classification of consequence, which include a consideration of immediacy of hazards.

The key to the classification is that the designation of risk is based upon the consideration of both:

- a) **the magnitude of the potential consequence (i.e. severity).**
[takes into account both the potential severity of the hazard and the sensitivity of the receptor]
- b) **the magnitude of probability (i.e. likelihood).**
[takes into account both the presence of the hazard and receptor and the integrity of the pathway]

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A4.3 Classification of consequence

Classification	Definition	Examples
Severe	Highly elevated concentrations likely to result in "significant harm" to human health as defined by the EPA 1990, Part 2A, if exposure occurs. Equivalent to EA Category 1 pollution incident including persistent and/or extensive effects on water quality; leading to closure of a potable abstraction point; major impact on amenity value or major damage to agriculture or commerce. Major damage to aquatic or other ecosystems, which is likely to result in a substantial adverse change in its functioning or harm to a species of special interest that endangers the long-term maintenance of the population. Catastrophic damage to crops, buildings or property.	Significant harm to humans is defined in circular 01/2006 as death, disease*, serious injury, genetic mutation, birth defects or the impairment of reproductive functions. Major fish kill in surface water from large spillage of contaminants from site. Highly elevated concentrations of List I and II substances present in groundwater close to small potable abstraction (high sensitivity). Explosion, causing building collapse (can also equate to immediate human health risk if buildings are occupied).
Medium	Elevated concentrations which could result in "significant harm" to human health as defined by the EPA 1990, Part 2A if exposure occurs. Equivalent to EA Category 2 pollution incident including significant effect on water quality; notification required to abstractors; reduction in amenity value or significant damage to agriculture or commerce. Significant damage to aquatic or other ecosystems, which may result in a substantial adverse change in its functioning or harm to a species of special interest that may endanger the long-term maintenance of the population. Significant damage to crops, buildings or property.	Significant harm to humans is defined in circular 01/2006 as death, disease*, serious injury, genetic mutation, birth defects or the impairment of reproductive functions. Damage to building rendering it unsafe to occupy e.g. foundation damage resulting in instability. Ingress of contaminants through plastic potable water pipes.
Mild	Exposure to human health unlikely to lead to "significant harm". Equivalent to EA Category 3 pollution incident including minimal or short lived effect on water quality; marginal effect on amenity value, agriculture or commerce. Minor or short lived damage to aquatic or other ecosystems, which is unlikely to result in a substantial adverse change in its functioning or harm to a species of special interest that would endanger the long-term maintenance of the population. Minor damage to crops, buildings or property.	Exposure could lead to slight short-term effects (e.g. mild skin rash). Surface spalling of concrete.
Minor	No measurable effect on humans. Equivalent to insubstantial pollution incident with no observed effect on water quality or ecosystems. Repairable effects of damage to buildings, structures and services.	The loss of plants in a landscaping scheme. Discoloration of concrete.

* For these purposes, disease is to be taken to mean an unhealthy condition of the body or a part of it and can include, for example, cancer, liver dysfunction or extensive skin ailments. Mental dysfunction is included only insofar as it is attributable to the effects of a pollutant on the body of the person concerned.

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A4.4 Classification of probability

(only applies if there is a possibility of a pollutant linkage being present)

Category	Definition	Examples
High likelihood	There is pollutant linkage and an event would appear very likely in the short-term and almost inevitable over the long-term, or there is evidence at the receptor of harm or pollution.	a) Elevated concentrations of toxic contaminants are present in soils in the top 0.5m in a residential garden. b) Ground/groundwater contamination could be present from chemical works, containing a number of USTs, having been in operation on the same site for over 50 years.
Likely	There is pollutant linkage and all the elements are present and in the right place which means that it is probable that an event will occur. Circumstances are such that an event is not inevitable, but possible in the short-term and likely over the long-term.	a) Elevated concentrations of toxic contaminants are present in soils at depths of 0.5-1.0m in a residential garden, or the top 0.5m in public open space. b) Ground/groundwater contamination could be present from an industrial site containing a UST present between 1970 and 1990. The tank is known to be single skin. There is no evidence of leakage although there are no records of integrity tests.
Low likelihood	There is pollutant linkage and circumstances are possible under which an event could occur. However, it is by no means certain that even over a long period such an event would take place, and is less likely in the shorter term.	a) Elevated concentrations of toxic contaminants are present in soils at depths >1m in a residential garden, or 0.5-1.0m in public open space. b) Ground/groundwater contamination could be present on a light industrial unit constructed in the 1990s containing a UST in operation over the last 10 years – the tank is double skinned but there is no integrity testing or evidence of leakage.
Unlikely	There is pollutant linkage but circumstances are such that it is improbable that an event would occur even in the very long-term.	a) Elevated concentrations of toxic contaminants are present below hardstanding. b) Light industrial unit <10 yrs old containing a double-skinned UST with annual integrity testing results available.

Note: A pollution linkage must first be established before probability is classified. If there is no pollution linkage then there is no potential risk. If there is no pollution linkage then there is no need to apply tests for probability and consequence.

For example if there is surface contamination and a major aquifer is present at depth, but this major aquifer is overlain by an aquiclude of significant thickness then there is no pollution linkage and the risks to the major aquifer are not assessed. The report should identify both the source and the receptor but state that because there is no linkage there are no potential risks.

A.4.5 The classification of risk

Probability (likelihood)	Consequence			
	Severe	Medium	Mild	Minor
High likelihood	Very high risk	High risk	Moderate risk	Low risk
Likely	High risk	Moderate risk	Moderate/low risk	Low risk
Low likelihood	Moderate risk	Moderate/low risk	Low risk	Very low risk
Unlikely	Moderate/low risk	Low risk	Very low risk	Very low risk

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A4.5.1 Description of the classified risks

Very high risk

There is a high probability that severe harm could arise to a designated receptor from an identified hazard at the site without remediation action OR there is evidence that severe harm to a designated receptor is already occurring. Realisation of that risk is likely to present a substantial liability to be site owner/occupier. Investigation is required as a matter of urgency and remediation works likely to follow in the short-term.

High risk

Harm is likely to arise to a designated receptor from an identified hazard at the site without remediation action. Realisation of the risk is likely to present a substantial liability to the site owner/occupier. Investigation is required as a matter of urgency to clarify the risk. Remediation works may be necessary in the short-term and are likely over the longer term.

Moderate risk

It is possible that harm could arise to a designated receptor from an identified hazard. However, it is either relatively unlikely that any such harm would be severe, and if any harm were to occur it is more likely, that the harm would be relatively mild. Further investigative work is normally required to clarify the risk and to determine the potential liability to site owner/occupier. Some remediation works may be required in the longer term.

Low risk

It is possible that harm could arise to a designated receptor from identified hazard, but it is likely at worst, that this harm if realised would normally be mild. It is unlikely that the site owner/occupier would face substantial liabilities from such a risk. Further investigative work (which is likely to be limited) to clarify the risk may be required. Any subsequent remediation works are likely to be relatively limited.

Very low risk

It is a low possibility that harm could arise to a designated receptor, but it is likely at worst, that this harm if realised would normally be mild or minor.

No potential risk

There is no potential risk if no pollution linkage has been established.

Definitions	
Hazard	A property or situation which in certain circumstances could lead to harm. [The properties of different hazards must be assessed in relation to their potential to affect the various different receptors].
Risk	A combination of the probability or frequency of the occurrences of a defined hazard AND the magnitude of the consequences of that occurrence.
Probability	The mathematical expression of the chance of a particular event in a given period of time [e.g. probability of 0.2 is equivalent to 20% or a 1 in 5 chance].
Likelihood	Probability; the state or fact of being likely.
Consequences	The adverse effects (or harm) arising from a defined hazard which impairs the quality of the environment or human health in the short or longer term.
Pollution linkage	An identified pathway is capable of exposing a receptor to a contaminant and that contaminant is capable of harming the receptor.