

# Los Angeles Times

## California | Local

Archive for [Tuesday, October 20, 1998](#)

### Rocketdyne Study Finds No Toxic Harm

By [Kate Folmar](#)

[October 20, 1998](#) *in print edition B-6*

Concluding a seven-month study, Rocketdyne officials Monday released off-site soil testing results that show no evidence of harmful chemicals or nuclear compounds migrating from the Santa Susana Field Laboratory to the nearby Bell Canyon neighborhood.

The study, unveiled Sunday to Bell Canyon homeowners, is the first significant examination of the field lab's effects on the surrounding community since a UCLA study released a year ago found that some Rocketdyne workers have a greater-than-expected cancer death rate.

"We're very pleased," said Inger M. Hodgson, public relations manager of Rocketdyne's environmental communications division. "Everything we found was compared to background [samples] and to health-based regulatory standards. Everything but one [compound] came back well below the health-based standards. The study's conclusion is that Rocketdyne operations have not impacted the Bell Canyon area."

Rocketdyne's critics, however, blasted the study as biased, unscientific and lacking oversight from the handful of regulatory agencies that monitor Rocketdyne's 2,668-acre, open-air field lab in the hills northwest of Chatsworth.

"These results are a joke," said Joe Lyou, executive director of the anti-nuclear group Committee to Bridge the Gap, which holds seats on two Rocketdyne oversight panels.

"How can anyone expect a convicted felon—Rocketdyne has been convicted of environmental crimes—to take their own samples and give credible results?" he asked.

Bell Canyon homeowners requested the soil testing in March, hoping to find out whether the remnants of decades of rocket-engine testing and nuclear research had worked their way down the hill and onto their properties.

Several Bell Canyon homeowners association members were unavailable for comment Monday.

The contaminated field lab is the site of a multimillion-dollar cleanup effort and the focus of a handful of property damage and personal injury lawsuits.

Although most tests have found no chemicals or radionuclides leaching down from the hill into soil and ground water, contamination was found on two properties adjoining the site.

Because residents—not state or federal regulators—requested the tests, Rocketdyne had an outside contractor, Ogden Environmental of San Diego, take 24 soil samples from surrounding properties without gaining approval from various regulators.

Six background sites and 18 test sites were chosen for the study. Samples were taken from three residents' backyards, various spots along Bell Creek and areas where runoff leaves the field lab and surrounding areas.

Each sample was tested for 209 compounds, ranging from arsenic to zinc.

Two cancer-causing agents prevalent at the field lab, trichloroethylene and perchlorate, were not found off site even in minute traces, according to the study.

Thirty-six compounds—such as potassium, radium and uranium—were detected. Nearly all of them were below the EPA's threshold for determining whether a contaminant found in soil would be harmful if touched or ingested through dust.

Arsenic is the one compound that vastly exceeded the EPA standards in the Bell Canyon area.

However, the amount of the toxin found in Bell Canyon is similar to—or lower than—levels found elsewhere in California and the nation, Kelly and a Rocketdyne expert said.

The amount of arsenic in some common foods is higher than that in Bell Canyon, said Rocketdyne toxicologist Michael Sullivan.

“Most people associate arsenic with [the play] ‘Arsenic and Old Lace’ and old ladies poisoning old men with arsenic-laced tea. But that’s a very high dose at one time,” Sullivan said. “It’s not the same as being exposed to a low level all your life in your diet. I was out Friday night and ordered a shrimp dish that had a much higher arsenic count than we have here.”

FYI

Two meetings about the future of the EPA work group monitoring the cleanup of the Santa Susana Field Lab will take place Wednesday. The first is closed to the public. The second, hosted by the Rocketdyne Cleanup Coalition and the work group's community representatives, will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Simi Valley Library community room. Discussion topics include cleanup standards and the adequacy of regulation of the site.

## Related Articles

- [Rocketdyne Lab Cleanup Standards Are Called Lax](#) Jun 25, 1999
- [Rocketdyne Gets Funds to Clean Site](#) Dec 16, 1998
- [Rocketdyne Panels Face Termination](#) Sep 24, 1998
- [Lab's Neighbors Put In Class of Their Own](#) Jul 19, 1998
- [Neighbors Air Doubts Over Rocketdyne Study](#) Oct 12, 2000

<http://8.12.42.31/1998/oct/20/local/me-34369>