

Ground Water Contamination

Lesson Plan #3: What is Ground Water Contamination?

Objectives: Learn what a contaminant is and how contaminants flow through an aquifer.

- What is a contaminant?
- What are common sources of contaminants?
- What affects contaminant flow through an aquifer?
- How to sample ground water.
- How to predict downgradient contaminant concentrations.

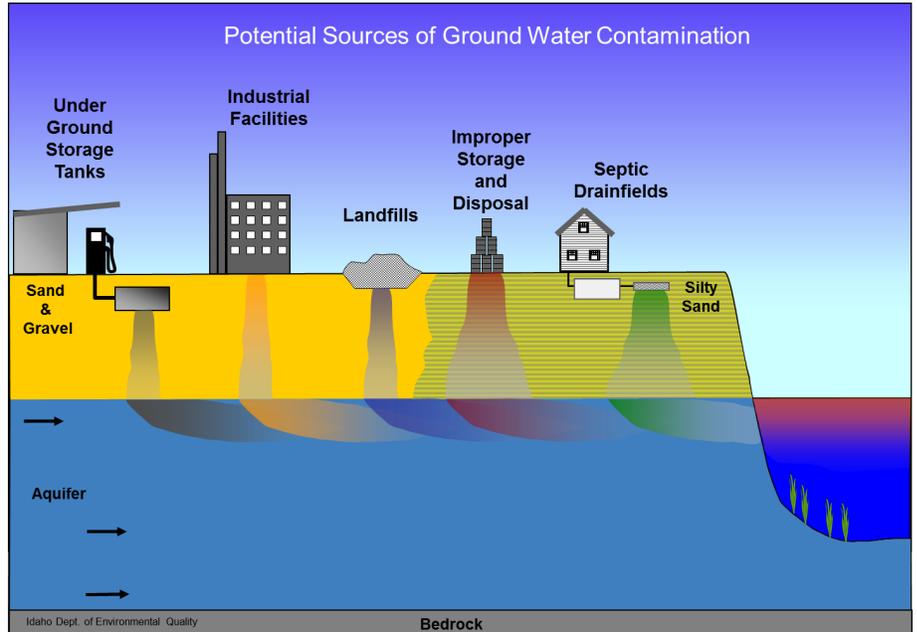
Grades: 10– 12

Materials:

- Calculator/spreadsheet

Ground Water Contamination:

Ground water contamination is generally the result of chemicals used by humans entering an aquifer. If ground water has chemicals from human activity it is said to be contaminated. If the concentration of one or more chemicals is too elevated it may not be safe to drink.



Where do these chemicals come from? Humans use a number of different materials that contain chemicals. These liquid or solid materials are often stored in large tanks. There are a number of different sources of contamination such as:

1. Underground Storage Tanks
2. Industrial Facilities
3. Landfills
4. Improper Storage or Disposal
5. Septic Drainfields

If these liquids or solids that contain chemicals are not used or stored properly they can leak the chemicals into the soil and eventually into the ground water.

Underground Storage Tanks are commonly used to hold thousands of gallons of gasoline or diesel at gas stations. As the tanks age they may start to rust and corrode eventually forming holes. If the tank has holes then the gasoline or diesel will be released and infiltrate downward potentially contaminating the ground water.



Industrial Facilities often use large quantities of chemicals. Sometimes there are accidental spills of chemicals or improper storage that may result in releases to nearby rivers and streams, or may eventually seep into ground water.



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Landfills are places where household wastes go. Some household wastes contain chemicals that could be dangerous. If the household waste is allowed to sit outside, chemicals may seep out into the ground underneath. Most landfills have a low permeability layer underneath to keep chemicals from seeping into the ground water. Often after the waste is dumped a layer of low permeability soil will be placed on top to keep rain water from seeping into the waste and carrying chemicals into the soil. A number of cities have special hazardous waste drop off locations to put hazardous chemicals instead of throwing them into the garbage so that they stay out of the landfills.

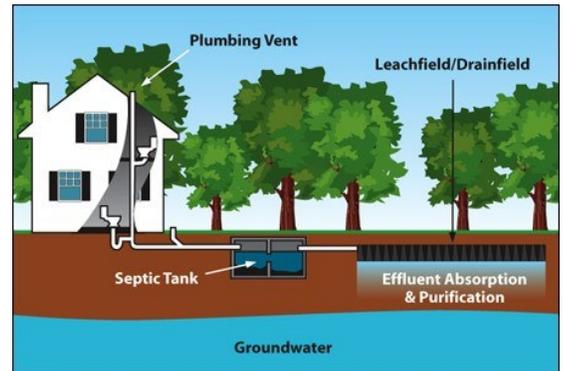


Improper storage and disposal may cause chemicals to seep or leak into the soil and contaminate the ground water. Chemicals should always be stored in proper containers and the containers should often be kept inside and on floors that will hold any spills or leaks if they occur



Septic Drainfields are used to dispose of wastewater from houses into the ground. If built and maintained properly the septic system will keep most contaminants out of the ground water. If a septic system fails or is not built properly then it may introduce contaminants like bacteria or viruses into the ground water. If the homeowner is pouring chemicals down the drain rather than taking them to the hazardous waste drop off locations the chemicals will go to the drainfield and seep into the ground water. If there is a water well nearby the bacteria, viruses or chemicals coming from the drainfield may end up in someone's drinking water.

The rate that contaminants will be transported through an aquifer is affected by four processes; 1) advection, 2) dispersion 3) retardation, and 4) degradation. Advection is a process where contaminants will be carried along with the ground water. Dispersion is a process that results in contaminants spreading out away from the source. Retardation is a broad term that includes a variety of process that causes contaminants to migrate slower than the ground water. Degradation describes how the contaminant will breakdown with time.



Contaminants will advect at the same rate as the velocity of ground water. Dispersion will occur longitudinally (along the flow path), laterally and vertically (both perpendicular to the flow path). Dispersion will cause an increase in the plume size and a decrease in concentration. Dispersion is caused by 1) mechanical mixing of water, 2) convoluted pathways around aquifer material, and 3) changes in hydraulic conductivity of the aquifer material.

Dispersion coefficient is estimated with the following equation;

$$DL = \alpha L v$$

$$DT = \alpha T v$$

$$DV = \alpha V v$$

Where;

DL, DT, Dv= Longitudinal, transverse and vertical dispersion in feet² /day.

v = average pore water velocity in feet/day.

αL , αT , αV = Longitudinal, transverse and vertical dispersivity coefficient in feet.



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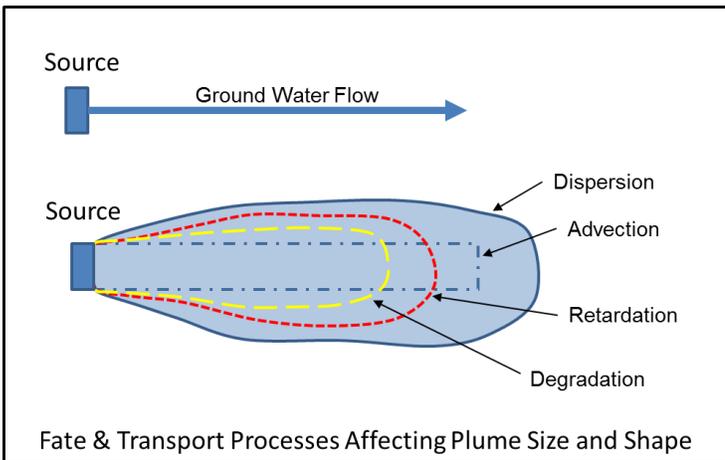
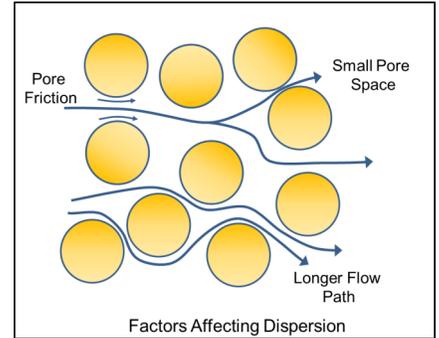
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Empirical evidence shows that the dispersion is scale dependent. The larger the plume the greater the dispersion. A general rule of thumb for estimating the longitudinal, transverse and vertical dispersivity is;

$$\alpha_L = 1/10\text{th the plume length.}$$

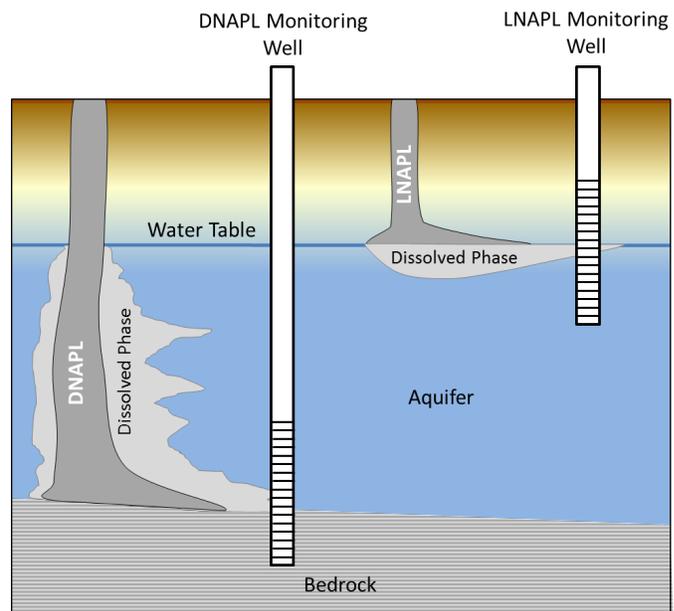
$$\alpha_T = \alpha_L / 10$$

$$\alpha_V = \alpha_T / 10$$



There are many processes that affect retardation, generally the most significant process is sorption. Sorption is the process where contaminants will adhere to the aquifer sediments. Contaminants made up of cations (positively charged ions) can be sorbed onto clay minerals because clay minerals have a negative charge. Organic chemicals, such as benzene found in gasoline, can be sorbed onto organic carbon in soils. The process of sorption will slow the contaminant movement and reduce the dissolved concentration. Contaminants can undergo degradation. Degradation is the process of breaking down the contaminant into simpler compounds. The degradation process can occur chemically or can be facilitated by bacteria (biodegradation).

Contaminants may dissolve in ground water and are transported downgradient. Other contaminants do not readily dissolve and are referred to as non-aqueous phase liquids. Some non-aqueous phase liquids are less dense than water and will float on top of the ground water, and are called light –non-aqueous phase liquids (LNAPL). Others are more dense than water and will sink to the bottom of the aquifer and are called Dense Non-Aqueous Phase Liquids (DNAPL). Monitoring wells used to sample for each of these types of contaminants need to be constructed differently in order to be effective at Monitoring wells constructed for detecting LNAPLs have the screens placed on top of the water table, and monitoring wells constructed to detect DNAPLs have the screens placed at the bottom of the aquifer. detecting the presence of the contaminants.



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Exercise:

The Acme Chemical Company has discovered that after an bi-annual chemical inventory they cannot account for 26,280 gallons of chemical X that is stored in their 20,000 gallon underground storage tanks, as shown on the attached map. The Acme Chemical Co. does not know which UST could be leaking. Chemical X readily dissolves in water and does not sorb onto soil or the aquifer material.

The aquifer has the following characteristics;

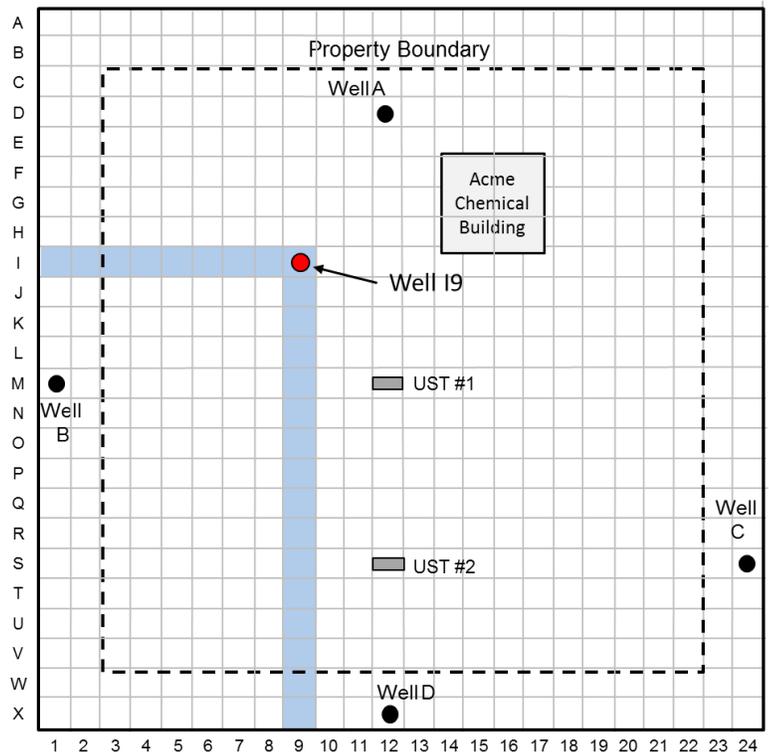
- Thickness = 50 feet
- Hydraulic Conductivity = 300 feet/day
- $\alpha L = 50$ feet
- $\alpha T = 5$ feet
- $\alpha V = 0.5$ feet
- Porosity = 0.25

Release characteristics;

- Duration of the Release = 180 days
- Conc. of chemical X = 1,000 milligrams/liter

They have hired you as an expert hydrogeologist to determine;

1. Which direction is the contaminant plume headed?
2. Has the contaminant plume reached the property boundary?
3. How long will it take to reach the property boundary?
4. Is there the potential that any of the drinking water wells (A,B,C,D) may be contaminated?
5. What maybe the concentration in the drinking water well if the water becomes contaminated.?
6. The maximum concentration allowed in drinking water for Chemical X is 0.1 mg/l. Is there the potential that the UST release will cause the concentrations of Chemical X in the drinking water well to exceed this?
7. How could you reduce or eliminate the release of chemical X?



You have been given funding for a total of five monitoring wells to determine the ground water level and confirm contaminant concentration. You can only drill the wells on the Acme Chemical Co. property. Ground water flow direction can vary across a site and is unknown at the Acme Chemical Co. property.



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Exercise:

Your instructor will divide you into pairs or small groups each will be assign one of two different scenario's either A or B as seen at the top of the page.

As you drill each of your **five** wells well you can find out the water elevation and concentration of chemical X from someone in the other group. The location of each well will correspond to a grid defined by the letter on the vertical axis and a number on the horizontal axis. The groundwater elevations and contaminant concentrations for Group A are attached to the Group B lesson plans and vice versa. Once you determine the ground water flow direction and gradient, you should use the Contaminant Fate & Transport spreadsheet to help answer the questions and evaluate data if appropriate.



The spreadsheet has inputs for both source and aquifer characteristics. The resulting down gradient ground water concentrations are calculated using the Domenico Solution (see the calculations tab for the solution). Determine the gradient and flow direction from your five wells. Place the source and aquifer information into the spreadsheet and see what the resulting concentrations would be down gradient. See if the concentrations in your five wells match the concentrations calculated from the spreadsheet. Good luck!

2D - Fate and Transport of Chemical - No Retardation or Degradation

Project: Fate and Transport Training
 Date: 8/20/2002
 Prepared by: JNM
 Contaminant: Chemical X

Input

Source Characteristics			
Concentration (mg/l)	Width (ft)	Thickness (ft)	Duration of Release (days)
100	10	10	365

[] - Input Cell

Aquifer Characteristics					
Hydraulic Conductivity (ft/day)	Gradient (ft/ft)	Porosity	Dispersivity		
			Longitudinal (ft)	Transverse (ft)	Vertical (ft)
100	0.013	0.25	20	2	0.2

Model Domain	
Length (ft)	Width (ft)
500	250

Results

Lateral Feet From Source	Horizontal Feet From Source										
	50	100	150	200	250	300	350	400	450	500	
250	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
200	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
150	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.005	0.010	0.017	
100	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.021	0.060	0.117	0.183	0.253	0.321	0.384	
50	0.066	0.818	1.662	2.198	2.479	2.601	2.630	2.606	2.552	2.482	
0	26.897	17.470	12.975	10.319	8.564	7.319	6.389	5.669	5.094	4.626	
-50	0.066	0.818	1.662	2.198	2.479	2.601	2.630	2.606	2.552	2.482	
-100	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.021	0.060	0.117	0.183	0.253	0.321	0.384	
-150	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.005	0.010	0.017	
-200	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
-250	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	



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