

### We talk a lot about "bioremediation" at Bio-Dry...

#### What is Bioremediation?

Bioremediation allows natural processes to clean up harmful chemicals in the environment. Microscopic "bugs" or *microbes* that live in soil and groundwater like to eat certain harmful chemicals, such as those found in gasoline and oil spills. When microbes completely digest these chemicals, they change them into water and harmless gases such as carbon dioxide.

#### How does it work?

In order for microbes to clean up harmful chemicals, the right temperature, nutrients (fertilizers), and amount of oxygen must be present in the soil and groundwater. These conditions allow the microbes to grow and multiply—and eat more chemicals. When conditions are not right, microbes grow too slowly or die. Or they can create more harmful chemicals. If conditions are not right at a site, EPA works to improve them. One way they improve conditions is to pump air, nutrients, or other substances (such as molasses) underground.

Sometimes microbes are added if enough aren't already there. The right conditions for bioremediation cannot always be achieved underground. At some sites, the weather is too cold or the soil is too dense. At such sites, EPA might dig up the soil to clean it above ground where heaters and soil mixing help improve conditions. After the soil is dug up, the proper nutrients are added. Oxygen also may be added by stirring the mixture or by forcing air through it. However, some microbes work better without oxygen. With the right temperature and amount of oxygen and nutrients, microbes can do their work to "bioremediate" the harmful chemicals.

Sometimes mixing soil can cause harmful chemicals to evaporate before the microbes can eat them. To prevent these chemicals from polluting the air, EPA mixes the soil inside a special tank or building where chemicals that evaporate can be collected and treated.

Microbes can help clean polluted groundwater as well as soil. To do this, EPA drills wells and pumps some of the groundwater into tanks. Here, the water is mixed with nutrients and

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air before it is pumped back into the ground. The added nutrients and air help the microbes bioremediate the groundwater. Groundwater can also be mixed underground by pumping nutrients and air into the wells.

Once harmful chemicals are cleaned up and microbes have eaten their available “food,” the microbes die.

### Is bioremediation safe?

Bioremediation is very safe because it relies on microbes that naturally occur in soil. These microbes are helpful and pose no threat to people at the site or in the community. Microbes themselves won't hurt you, but never touch the polluted soil or groundwater—especially before eating. No dangerous chemicals are used in bioremediation. The nutrients added to make microbes grow are fertilizers commonly used on lawns and gardens. Because bioremediation changes the harmful chemicals into water and harmless gases, the harmful chemicals are completely destroyed. To ensure that bioremediation is working, EPA tests samples of soil and groundwater.

For more information, check out this EPA Citizen's Guide:

<http://www.epa.gov/tio/download/citizens/bioremediation.pdf>