**What is Arsenic?**

**A**rsenic is a naturally occurring substance. It occurs in several forms, often in compounds with other chemical elements. Arsenic and all of its compounds are poisonous but the toxicity varies. For example, inorganic arsenic - arsenic combined with oxygen, chlorine or sulfur - is thought to be the most toxic, while most organic forms of arsenic are relatively less toxic. In its solid state arsenic appears as a silver-gray, brittle semi-metal that tarnishes in the air. It is about the 52nd most common chemical element on the earth.

**Human uses for arsenic.**

**A**rsenic has been known since ancient times, though probably in compound form rather than in its pure state. It is used in combination with other materials in pigments, poison gases and insecticides (such as Paris Green, calcium arsenate and lead arsenate) and is well known from former use as a rat poison. Arsenic has a long history of medical applications; before penicillin was developed an arsenic compound was used to treat syphilis and yaws. Arsenic is used in ammunition manufacturing because it helps to create harder and rounder bullets. Arsenic is used in small quantities in semi-conductor manufacturing. It is used as a preservative in tanning and taxidermy, as well as on the exterior of wood such as deck and playground materials.

**Arsenic and your health.**

Inorganic arsenic is extremely toxic. Produced as a byproduct of industrial production such as copper smelting, it can cause both acute and long-term health effects. One of the problems with arsenic exposure is that many of the symptoms may result from causes other than arsenic - so a person who has been exposed may not suspect arsenic. Therefore, if you believe you may potentially be exposed to arsenic in the soil it is important to take steps to reduce your exposure to this toxic substance. Since arsenic in soils can be a health hazard, gardeners and others who work or play in contaminated soils should take precautions to limit and reduce the amount of soil they swallow or breathe.

**Arsenic poisoning.**

Arsenic poisoning or arsenicosis is a condition caused by the ingestion, absorption or inhalation of dangerous levels of arsenic. Arsenic is a natural semi-metallic chemical that is found all over the world in groundwater. Arsenic poisoning can cause major health complications if not treated, including death. Because of the risks involved, some precautions are required to protect the populations and workers at risk of arsenic poisoning. Arsenic has proven to be potentially useful in cancer treatment, as some studies have shown it can send the disease into remission and help thin the blood. This treatment is still being tested, but could show some promise in the ongoing battle against cancer.