

# Katrina residue dangers questioned

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A conflict has flared concerning dangers posed by toxic substances left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina along the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Federal officials last week announced the tons of chemicals and other dangerous substances remaining when the winds died and floodwaters receded now pose no overt threat.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said levels of remaining organic compounds, hydrocarbons, pesticides and heavy metals, are, for the most part, similar to the historical levels found before Katrina struck.

That has upset independent investigators who this week said the situation along the Gulf Coast is more urgent, the Christian Science Monitor reported Thursday.

Independent scientists who tested soil and sediment in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Sierra Club say they found dangerous levels of chemicals and bacteria.

Environmental chemist Wilma Subra told the Monitor some government officials believe that when the sludge dries, the organisms are dead. But she said people in the affected areas are inhaling dust that contains unsafe microorganisms.

EPA officials have declined comment until they read the independent reports.

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