

Frequently Asked Questions: Rio Grande Campus (RGC) Tunnel

What is the “tunnel” and where is it located?

- Years ago, when RGC was the Austin High School, the tunnel was used as a pedestrian walkway from the main building to the gym.
- The RGC tunnel runs from the north end of the RGC basement underneath West Ave. to the Austin Independent School District (AISD) gymnasium.
- The tunnel is closed and no ACC personnel are allowed to enter the tunnel.

Why do we smell a periodic odor coming from the tunnel?

- Periodically after a rainfall, water will collect in the lowest portion of the pedestrian tunnel.
- This water will sometimes contain a petroleum product floating on top that produces a smell. This petroleum product consists of old, degraded heavy hydrocarbons and phase-separated hydrocarbons. Phase-separated hydrocarbons (oil) do not mix with water, instead they separate and float.

Where is this petroleum product coming from?

- HBC Terracon, ACC’s environmental services firm, has done sampling surveys of the entire RGC property. This Phase II Environmental Assessment, was part of the due diligence process prior to the purchase of the property from AISD. .
- HBC Terracon drilled a series of sampling wells around the campus to evaluate presence of ground water and contaminants. Only one well – adjacent to the tunnel - indicated the presence of either water or hydrocarbons.
- When the tunnel was originally built in 1938, prior to ACC purchasing the property, fill material was placed on the north and south sides of the tunnel. Testing has shown that this petroleum-based product is isolated to this area. All sampling done in other areas of the RGC property showed neither water nor hydrocarbons.
- One possible source of the hydrocarbons is the abandoned fuel tank near the Boiler House. As stated earlier, this fuel tank and petroleum product existed prior to the purchase of the property. Since ACC purchased the property, we have been working with TCEQ to obtain closure of this tank. The tank has been cleaned and filled with concrete.

Have you tested the petroleum product and does it present a health hazard?

- Additional sampling has been completed to determine what was present in the tunnel after the rainfalls. There was no petroleum product present in the water, but an odor persisted.
- Previous HBC Terracon testing results show that there are no volatile chemicals in the product.
- Analytical results on the water in the tunnel indicate that the water contained 2.77 parts per million of non volatile hydrocarbons and 0.83 parts per billion of methyl tert-butyl ether, which is used as gasoline additive. Methyl *tert*-butyl ether

(MTBE) is a flammable liquid with a distinctive, disagreeable odor. It is made from blending chemicals such as isobutylene and methanol, and has been used since the 1980s as an additive for unleaded gasoline to achieve more efficient burning.

- Additional air sampling was performed by Baer Engineering in early 2004. Samples were collected inside the tunnel, the service chase, boiler room and adjoining classroom and hallways. The samples were analyzed for numerous constituents, including volatile chemicals and semi volatile chemicals. The analytical results on the air sampling indicate that there were no unsafe levels of air contaminants present.

What is ACC doing about this problem?

Short Term:

- Classes held in the classroom directly adjacent to the tunnel have been moved to another location indefinitely.
- The tunnel has been periodically pumped out and the water disposed of properly.
- Water samples were collected in the tunnel. Results of this sampling are included in this FAQ under question number four.
- Air sampling of tunnel was performed by air sampling experts. Results of air sampling are discussed in question 3.
- ACC entrance to tunnel has been locked and sealed since early 2002.
- Maintenance personnel do a weekly visual inspection of sealed doors to ensure integrity of seal.
- After any amount of rainfall or accumulation of liquid in the tunnel, the tunnel has been pumped out so that no liquid stands in the tunnel.

Long Term:

- ACC is currently working with environmental regulatory agencies such as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and legal counsel to ensure the College meets all regulatory requirements for remediation.
- Initial site remediation plans of using site recovery wells and a pumper truck to remove any product has proven to be ineffective. As a result, a skimmer system was installed at the southwest corner of the Annex over the Winter break. The system utilizes pumps to remove the product on a continuous basis. The pumps then transfer the hydrocarbon product into a storage tank. The tank is then pumped out periodically and then the product properly disposed. The intent of these actions is to remove the hydrocarbons to the maximum extent possible and to close the site through environmental regulatory agencies. The TCEQ approved system described above is currently in operation and will be in place for 3 – 6 months.
- In the event that removal of the phase-separated hydrocarbons does not eliminate the periodic fume problem, additional actions to address the periodic residual hydrocarbon odors may include the installation of a ventilation system in tunnel to eliminate fumes.