This fact sheet answers the most frequently asked health questions (FAQs) about fuel oils. For more information, call the ATSDR Information Center at 1-888-422-8737. This fact sheet is one in a series of summaries about hazardous substances and their health effects. It’s important you understand this information because this substance may harm you. The effects of exposure to any hazardous substance depend on the dose, the duration, how you are exposed, personal traits and habits, and whether other chemicals are present.

**SUMMARY:** Fuel oils are liquid mixtures produced from petroleum, and their use mostly involves burning them as fuels. Drinking or breathing fuel oils may cause nausea or nervous system effects. However, exposure under normal use conditions is not likely to be harmful. Fuel oils have been found in at least 26 of the 1,430 National Priorities List sites identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

### What are fuel oils?
(Pronounced /fuːəl ˈɔɪlz/)

Fuel oils are a variety of yellowish to light brown liquid mixtures that come from crude petroleum. Some chemicals found in fuel oils may evaporate easily, while others may more easily dissolve in water.

Fuel oils are produced by different petroleum refining processes, depending on their intended uses. Fuel oils may be used as fuel for engines, lamps, heaters, furnaces, and stoves, or as solvents.

Some commonly found fuel oils include kerosene, diesel fuel, jet fuel, range oil, and home heating oil. These fuel oils differ from one another by their hydrocarbon compositions, boiling point ranges, chemical additives, and uses.

### What happens to fuel oils when they enter the environment?

- Some chemicals found in fuel oils may stick to particles in water, which will eventually cause them to settle to the bottom sediment.
- Some of the chemicals found in fuel oils may be broken down slowly in air, water, and soil by sunlight or small organisms.
- Some of the chemicals found in fuel oils may build up significantly in plants and animals.

### How might I be exposed to fuel oils?

- Using a home kerosene heater or stove, or using fuel oils at work.
- Breathing air in home or building basements that has been contaminated with fuel oil vapors entering from the soil.
- Drinking or swimming in water that has been contaminated with fuel oils from a spill or a leaking underground storage tank.
- Touching soil contaminated with fuel oils.
- Using fuel oils to wash paint or grease from skin or equipment.

### How can fuel oils affect my health?

Little information is available about the health effects that may be caused by fuel oils. People who use kerosene...
ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html

Where can I get more information? For more information, contact the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Division of Toxicology, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Mailstop F-32, Atlanta, GA 30333. Phone:1-888-422-8737, FAX: 770-488-4178. ToxFAQs Internet address via WWW is http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html

ATSDR can tell you where to find occupational and environmental health clinics. Their specialists can recognize, evaluate, and treat illnesses resulting from exposure to hazardous substances. You can also contact your community or state health or environmental quality department if you have any more questions or concerns.