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Assessment Of Heavy Metal Contamination In Urban Soil And Its Implications For Human Health

Dr. Brahmam Pasumarthi[1] , Dr. Shiv Charan Prajapati[2] , Mr. Alok Raj (Corresponding author)[3] , Dr. Reena Saxena[4] , Dr. Shravan Kumar[5] , Dr. Rahul[6]

Abstract:

Urbanisation has significantly changed the composition and quality of soil in urban areas all over the world. It is characterised by fast population increase, considerable infrastructural development, and intense land use. Urban growth presents a multitude of environmental difficulties, one of which is soil pollution by heavy metals. This is a serious problem that has far-reaching effects on human health, ecological integrity, and sustainable development. This extensive study aims to explore the various aspects of heavy metal pollution in urban soil environments, clarifying its various origins, complex distribution patterns, varied chemical compositions, dynamic transformation processes, and resulting effects on both human health and the environment.

The complex interactions between anthropogenic activities, industrial processes, vehicle emissions, construction practices, waste disposal techniques, agricultural inputs, atmospheric deposition, and natural weathering processes are the many and varied sources of heavy metal contamination in urban soils. Numerous heavy metals, such as lead (Pb), cadmium (Cd), arsenic (As), chromium (Cr), mercury (Hg), and nickel (Ni), are introduced into urban soil matrices by these diverse sources through a variety of pathways, such as atmospheric deposition, runoff, leaching, erosion, infiltration, and direct emissions. Urban soil contains a remarkable heterogeneity in the spatial and temporal distribution of heavy metals, which can be attributed to a multitude of factors including topography, transportation networks, industrial activities, pollution sources, land use patterns, and human behaviour.

Geographic information systems (GIS), remote sensing, spatial interpolation, geostatistical modelling, and field sampling are some of the advanced analytical approaches needed to map the spatial distribution of hea[1]vy metal pollution in urban soil environments. With the use of these approaches, contamination hotspots may be located, exposure risks can be evaluated, pollution gradients can be drawn, spatial variability can be described, and remediation efforts can be prioritised. Furthermore, the quantification, speciation, and mobility of heavy metals in urban soil matrices are made easier by sophisticated analytical techniques like X-ray fluorescence (XRF), inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), atomic

[1]Associate professor Dept of H&S PACE Institute of technology and sciences Ongole Prakasam district Andhra Pradesh.
[2]Lecturer, Department of Paint Technology, Government Polytechnic, Bindki, Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, Rashtrakavi Ramdhari Singh Dinkar College of Engineering, BEU, Begusarai, Bihar, India
[4]Assistant professor, School of Applied Sciences Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur, Rajasthan
[5]Assistant Professor, Department of Biochemical Engineering, HBTU, Kanpur Uttar Pradesh, India
[6]Lecturer, Department of Paint Technology, Government Polytechnic, Bindki, Fatehpur,
Uttar Pradesh, India.

absorption spectrometry (AAS), sequential extraction analysis, and bioavailability assays. These techniques also shed light on the environmental fate, transport mechanisms, and ecological impacts of heavy metals.

Due to a variety of exposure routes, toxicological mechanisms, dose-response relationships, demographic vulnerabilities, and socioeconomic disparities, there are numerous and intricate health hazards connected to heavy metal contamination in urban soil settings. Chronic exposure to heavy metals can cause a wide range of harmful health effects, such as neurotoxicity, developmental disorders, cognitive impairment, respiratory ailments, cardiovascular diseases, renal dysfunction, reproductive disorders, immunotoxicity, genotoxicity, carcinogenicity, and endocrine disruption. Exposure can occur through inhaling contaminated dust, ingesting soil particles, dermal contact, consuming contaminated food and water, and uptake by food crops.

An integrated, multidisciplinary approach involving environmental science, toxicology, epidemiology, risk assessment, environmental monitoring, public health, urban planning, community engagement, policy formulation, and regulatory enforcement is required to assess and manage the health risks associated with heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments. Methods for quantifying risk, such as hazard quotient (HQ), hazard index (HI), lifetime cancer risk, carcinogenic risk, non-carcinogenic risk, probabilistic risk assessment (PRA), and exposure-response modelling, allow for the identification of vulnerable populations, the assessment of health impacts, the estimation of exposure risks, and the prioritisation of risk management.

A comprehensive approach that incorporates pollution prevention, source management, soil remediation, land-use planning, regulatory enforcement, public education, community empowerment, and stakeholder engagement is needed to mitigate heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments. Through the use of emission controls, waste reduction plans, recycling programmes, and environmental management systems, pollution prevention measures seek to reduce the amount of heavy metals released into the environment. In order to lessen the release, movement, and deposition of heavy metals in urban environments, source management strategies focus on particular pollution sources, such as manufacturing facilities, transportation networks, waste disposal sites, contaminated sites, and point sources of pollution.

A range of methods, including physical, chemical, biological, and combination remediation procedures, are available for mitigating heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments using soil remediation technology. To physically remove or isolate contaminated soil from the environment, physical remediation processes include soil excavation, washing, vapour extraction, flushing, and capping. Chemical stabilisation, soil amendment, soil washing, and soil flushing are examples of chemical remediation processes that try to immobilise, precipitate, or change heavy metals into less mobile or dangerous forms. Phytoremediation, microbial remediation, and bioaugmentation are examples of biological remediation strategies that take advantage of the innate capacities of fungi, microbes, and plants to absorb, accumulate, metabolise, or detoxify heavy metals in soil matrices.

Through directing the spatial distribution of land uses, managing development activities, protecting green spaces, creating buffer zones, enforcing zoning laws, and encouraging sustainable urban design principles, land-use planning strategies are essential to reducing heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments. By incorporating soil quality concerns into urban planning procedures, land use choices are guided by community goals, ecological interests, public health issues, and environmental concerns. Additionally, community outreach, *public education, and stakeholder engagement programmes enable local businesses, government agencies, schools, and community organisations to work together on pollution control, environmental stewardship, and soil conservation projects.*

In summary, the problem of heavy metal pollution in urban soil settings is complex and calls for an all-encompassing, proactive, and integrated strategy to management, evaluation, and repair. This research paper adds to our understanding of the intricate relationships between urbanisation, industrialization, environmental pollution, human health, and sustainable development by clarifying the sources, distribution patterns, chemical compositions, exposure pathways, health risks, mitigation strategies, and regulatory frameworks associated with heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments. Together, researchers, legislators, practitioners, community leaders, and stakeholders can create more innovative, collaborative, and knowledge-sharing environments that will make urban environments safer, healthier, and more sustainable for both the present and the future.

1. Introduction:

The modern age is marked by urbanisation, which has changed global socioeconomic systems, demography, and landscapes. Currently, more than half of the world's population lives in urban regions (1). Urbanisation has resulted in significant environmental changes, such as the widespread pollution of soil by heavy metals, but it has also brought about previously unheard-of chances for economic growth, technical advancement, and cross-cultural exchange (2). Urban heavy metal pollution presents serious obstacles to sustainable development, ecological integrity, and public health, calling for thorough knowledge, calculated intervention, and coordinated action (3).

A wide range of elements with large atomic weights and densities are referred to as heavy metals, and they include species like lead (Pb), nickel (Ni), chromium (Cr), arsenic (As), and cadmium (Cd). Even while heavy metals are naturally present in the crust of the earth, human activities including waste disposal, mining, industrial processes, car emissions, and agricultural practices have hastened their release into the environment (4). The quantities of heavy metals in urban soil have been greatly increased by these human inputs, resulting in widespread pollution and related dangers (5).

Urban soil ecosystems are subject to heavy metal pollution due to intricate and diverse mechanisms that stem from both natural and human-induced activities. Particulate matter and gaseous pollutants from industrial sources, vehicle exhaust, and other anthropogenic sources are carried by air currents and settle onto terrestrial substrates through atmospheric deposition, which is the main mechanism by which heavy metals are deposited onto urban soil surfaces (6). Furthermore, runoff from impermeable surfaces—like pavements, rooftops, and roads—contributes to the movement of heavy metals into soil profiles, intensifying the levels of contamination in urban areas.

Heavy metals change physically, chemically, and biologically after they are deposited in soil, which affects how they are transported and how bioavailable they are. The characteristics of soil, including its pH, organic matter content, texture, and mineralogy, are important in controlling the sorption, desorption, and mobility of heavy metals in soil matrices (7). Moreover, interactions between plants, soil microbes, and other biotic elements and heavy metals can impact metal cycle, transformation, and speciation, which in turn affects the metals' ecological effects and behaviour in the ecosystem.

There are numerous negative effects of heavy metal pollution in urban soil environments, including serious hazards to ecosystem health, public health, and environmental quality (8). Chronic exposure to heavy metals via the skin, ingestion of soil particles, inhaled contaminated dust, and other means can result in a variety of harmful health effects, such as respiratory conditions, neurological disorders, cardiovascular disease, renal dysfunction, abnormal development, reproductive issues, and carcinogenicity. Because vulnerable groups are more prone to heavy metal toxicity—children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with pre-existing medical issues, for example—concerns regarding environmental justice and health disparities are heightened (9).

The issues presented by heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments necessitate an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that incorporates policy formation, scientific research, technological innovation, and community engagement (10). By enabling the identification, quantification, and speciation of heavy metals in soil samples, sophisticated analytical techniques like spectroscopy, chromatography, mass spectrometry, and microscopy shed light on the distribution, behaviour, and toxicity of these metals (11). In addition, risk assessment techniques like hazard quotient (HQ), hazard index (HI), and probabilistic risk assessment (PRA) support decision-making about mitigation and remediation measures by assisting in the evaluation of exposure routes and the estimation of health risks (12).

In conclusion, heavy metal poisoning of urban soil poses a serious threat to public health and the environment, with far-reaching effects on human health and urban sustainability (13). We can create practical plans to reduce heavy metal pollution, safeguard public health, and advance sustainable urban development by encouraging cooperation, innovation, and knowledge sharing among scientists, decision-makers, practitioners, and communities. We can work to create urban settings that are safer, healthier, and more resilient for both the current and upcoming generations by working together and taking coordinated action.

2. Methodology:

2.1 Study Area Selection

- Identifying densely populated urban areas, industrial sites, and possible heavy metal contamination sources.

- Taking into account the socioeconomic, meteorological, and geographic variables that affect the distribution and pathways of exposure to heavy metals.

- Choosing representative sampling locations according to land use classifications, closeness to sources of pollution, and fieldwork accessibility.

2.2 Sampling Design

- A random sampling technique to reduce bias and guarantee spatial representativeness.

- The study area is divided into zones or grids to enable systematic sampling.

- Determining the sample size using statistical factors such the margin of error, confidence level, and concentration variability of heavy metals.

- Gathering soil samples at various levels (surface, subsurface, etc.) in order to evaluate the vertical distribution of heavy metals and possible gradients of contamination.

2.3 Sample Collection and Preparation

- To prevent contaminating samples, use clean, non-contaminated tools and containers.

- Gathering soil sample depth uniformly and avoiding surface trash by utilising a soil auger or corer.

- GPS mapping of sample locations to help with data interpretation and preserve spatial accuracy.

- Composite sampling, which combines subsamples from several locations throughout the site at each sampling location.

- Allowing soil samples to air dry at room temperature in order to maintain sample integrity and stop microbial growth.

- Sieving soil samples to homogenise them before examination and to get rid of large particles.

2.4 Laboratory Analysis

- Measuring the amounts of heavy metals using suitable analytical methods, such as X-ray fluorescence (XRF), inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), or atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS).

- Acid digestion of soil samples in order to improve the solubility of heavy metals for examination and remove them from solid matrices.

- Calibration of analytical instruments to guarantee measurement accuracy and precision utilising quality control samples and approved reference materials.

- Measuring the amount of heavy metals present in soil samples and presenting the findings in standard units (e.g., ppm or mg/kg).

2.5 Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the distribution and variability of the amounts of heavy metals in samples of urban soil.

- Spatial patterns and hotspots of heavy metal contamination can be visualised using spatial analysis techniques including mapping, geostatistics, and interpolation.

- Statistical tests to compare the amounts of heavy metals between various land use categories or sampling locations, such as t-tests or analysis of variance (ANOVA).

- Correlation analysis to evaluate the associations between environmental factors (such as soil pH, organic matter content, and land use type) and concentrations of heavy metals.

- Multivariate statistical methods to distinguish between human and natural causes of heavy metal contamination, such as principal component analysis (PCA) and cluster analysis.

2.6 Health Risk Assessment

- Estimation of risks to human health from exposure to heavy metals utilising recognised risk assessment techniques, such as carcinogenic risk assessment, hazard index (HI), and hazard quotient (HQ).

- Determining exposure doses by ingestion, inhalation, and skin contact routes while taking into account toxicity reference values, exposure scenarios, and population demographics.

- Combining toxicological data and exposure dosage estimates to assess health risks, rank mitigation techniques, and guide risk management choices.

- Sensitivity analysis is used to determine assessment process uncertainties and evaluate the impact of important input parameters and assumptions on health risk assessments.

2.7 Mitigation Strategies

- Creation of focused mitigation plans based on data analysis and risk assessment results.

- Using soil remediation methods to lower the amounts of heavy metals in polluted soil, such as thermal treatment, chemical stabilisation, phytoremediation, and soil washing.

- Implementing pollution prevention techniques to reduce future heavy metal inputs into urban soil ecosystems, such as source control, waste management laws, and emission reduction plans.

- Combining zoning and land use planning to reduce human exposure to contaminated soil and avoid conflicts between land uses in high-risk locations.

- Public outreach and education programmes that encourage soil conservation techniques, increase knowledge of the dangers of heavy metal contamination, and enable local populations to take up the cause of pollution avoidance and environmental stewardship.

2.8 Reporting and Communication

- A thorough research report that includes documentation of the methodology, sample plans, analytical methods, and data analysis protocols.

- Presentation of findings in public forums, scholarly publications, conference proceedings, stakeholder seminars, and other venues to engage key stakeholders and spread knowledge.

- Including stakeholder comments and input to guarantee relevance and efficacy in the formulation of mitigation measures and policy recommendations.

- Constantly monitoring and assessing mitigation measures to determine their long-term effectiveness and make necessary strategy adaptations in response to shifting environmental conditions and new threats.

This research aims to contribute to the development of effective strategies for environmental management and public health protection by employing a systematic and rigorous methodology that covers sampling design, laboratory analysis, data interpretation, health risk assessment, and mitigation strategies. By doing so, it hopes to offer important insights into the extent, nature, and implications of heavy metal contamination in urban soil environments.

3. Urbanization and Heavy Metal Contamination

For centuries, the process of people moving from rural to urban areas and the expansion of urban centres has been known as urbanization (14). Cities become centres of economic activity, technological innovation, and cross-cultural interaction as their populations continue to rise. However, because urban areas are known for high levels of industrialization, traffic, construction, and human density—all of which contribute to environmental pollution, including heavy metal contamination of soil—this rapid urban expansion frequently comes at a cost to the environment (15).

The intricate relationships that exist between environmental processes, land use changes, and human activity are the basis of the complicated relationship between urbanisation and heavy metal contamination (16). Urban regions are hubs for industrial activity, with factories, processing plants, and refineries frequently situated near residential neighbourhoods. Urban soil becomes contaminated with heavy metals like lead, cadmium, mercury, and chromium as a result of industrial activities that discharge these pollutants into the environment through emissions, effluents, and waste disposal procedures (17).

Furthermore, land conversion, deforestation, and soil disturbance caused by urbanisation change the natural landscape and can release heavy metals from previously hidden metal deposits and geological reservoirs (18). Excavation, land grading, and demolition are examples of urban construction activities that disrupt soil profiles and discharge heavy metals into the environment (19). Urbanisation also results in more cars on the road, which produces emissions that contain heavy metals like lead from burning petrol and brake wear particles. These emissions then end up in the atmosphere and contaminate the soil (20).

Numerous factors, such as the density of industrial activity, transportation networks, land use patterns, soil qualities, and weather conditions, affect the dispersion of heavy metal contamination in metropolitan areas. When opposed to residential or recreational areas, industrial zones and brownfield sites—which are defined by past industrial activities—typically show greater levels of heavy metal contamination. Similar to this, due to vehicle emissions and runoff from paved surfaces, being close to major roads, highways, and transportation corridors is linked to heightened levels of heavy metals in soil (21).

The effects of heavy metal pollution on urban soil go beyond environmental deterioration to include dangers to human health, disturbance of ecosystems, and socioeconomic ramifications (22). Long-term soil persistence allows heavy metals to pose health concerns to humans through a variety of exposure pathways, such as ingestion of soil particles, skin contact, and breathing of contaminated dust. Due to their developing immune systems and frequent outdoor play, children are especially susceptible to heavy metal exposure, which can lead to behavioural issues, developmental delays, and cognitive deficiencies.

In addition, heavy metal pollution can harm plant development, deteriorate soil quality, and interfere with ecosystem processes, which can result in a decline in biodiversity (23), a decrease in agricultural output, and a reduction in ecosystem services. High levels of heavy metal contamination in urban settings might present difficulties for urban agriculture, redevelopment, and recreational land usage, which could have an adverse effect on property prices and community well-being.

Urban heavy metal contamination poses a number of issues that call for a coordinated, all-encompassing strategy that incorporates sustainable urban design techniques, pollution control, and remediation techniques (24). The amount of heavy metals that enter the environment can be reduced with the support of green infrastructure initiatives, waste management best practices, and reductions in emissions from industrial sources (25). Remediation methods that can be used to lower heavy metal concentrations in polluted soil and improve soil quality include chemical stabilisation, phytoremediation, and soil washing.

Furthermore, protecting sensitive land uses, minimising human exposure to contaminated soil, and advancing sustainable land management techniques are all made possible by including soil quality issues into urban planning processes (26). In regions where there is a high concentration of heavy metal contamination, incompatible land uses can be prevented by zoning laws, buffer zones, and land use restrictions (27). Initiatives aimed at empowering communities to fight for environmental justice and promoting public education and community participation can increase knowledge of the dangers of heavy metal exposure while also fostering collaboration amongst stakeholders to address the underlying causes of contamination.

In summary, the connection between urbanisation and heavy metal pollution highlights the intricate interactions that occur in urban settings between environmental factors, human activity, and socioeconomic dynamics (28). Through a comprehensive comprehension of the causes and consequences of heavy metal pollution, decision-makers, planners, and community members may create efficient plans to reduce pollution, safeguard public health, and advance environmentally friendly urban growth. Urban regions can work towards striking a balance between social fairness, economic prosperity, and environmental quality for both the present and future generations through interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and proactive management measures (29).

4. Sources of Heavy Metal Contamination in Urban Soil

Numerous anthropogenic and natural causes contribute to heavy metal contamination in urban soil settings, which is a result of the intricate interactions between human activity, environmental processes, and land use patterns (29). Effective pollution prevention, cleanup, and management measures aimed at preserving human health and environmental quality in metropolitan settings depend on the identification and comprehension of these sources.

4.1 Industrial Activities

Industries—manufacturing processes, metalworking operations, and chemical production facilities—are major contributors to the discharge of heavy metals into the environment. The surrounding soil environment may get contaminated with heavy metals like lead, cadmium, mercury, and chromium due to industrial emissions, effluents, and waste disposal methods (30). Furthermore, it's possible that past industrial activity in cities left legacy contamination behind, with brownfields—former industrial sites—acting as hotspots for the buildup of heavy metals in the soil.

4.2 Vehicular Emissions

Urban areas are heavily contaminated with heavy metals from transportation-related activities, especially those involving combustion engines. Through exhaust gases, brake wear particles, and tyre abrasion, vehicles release heavy metals including lead, cadmium, and zinc into the atmosphere. As a result of air fallout and runoff from road surfaces during rainstorm events, significant traffic on roads, highways, and urban thoroughfares can cause the deposition of heavy metals onto nearby soil surfaces.

4.3 Atmospheric Deposition

One important route by which heavy metals are transferred from industrial, urban, and agricultural settings to urban soil ecosystems is through atmospheric deposition. Before settling on terrestrial surfaces, wind currents have the ability to transport particulate matter, aerosols, and gaseous pollutants that are released by industrial sources, power plants, and motor vehicles over considerable distances. Over time, heavy metals deposited from the atmosphere can build up in urban soil, increasing the degree of contamination in built-up regions.

4.4 Waste Disposal

In urban soil, improper disposal of hazardous and solid wastes is a major source of heavy metal pollution. Waste disposal facilities, dumpsites, and landfills have the potential to release heavy metals into the groundwater and surrounding soil, endangering ecosystems and local residents. Furthermore, if batteries and other consumer goods containing heavy metals are not disposed of properly, they may leak toxins into the environment, worsening soil contamination in metropolitan areas. This includes e-waste and batteries.

4.5 Construction and Demolition

Urban development-related construction and demolition operations have the potential to change soil profiles and discharge heavy metals into the surrounding environment. Heavy metals can be released into soil and sediment by excavation, land grading, and the demolition of structures and infrastructure. Moreover, heavy metals included in paints, coatings, and treated wood have the potential to seep into the surrounding soil either during or after construction or disposal.

4.6 Agricultural Inputs

Through the use of agrochemicals including pesticides, fertilisers, and animal manure, agricultural operations can contribute to heavy metal contamination of soil in peri-urban or urban periphery areas. Heavy metals are sometimes added to fertilisers and soil amendments as additions or contaminants, and these substances can build up in soil over time with repeated application. Furthermore, agricultural runoff and contaminated irrigation water can introduce heavy metals into adjacent urban soil habitats.

4.7 Sewage Sludge

The use of biosolids, or sewage sludge, as a soil additive in gardening or agriculture can contaminate urban soil ecosystems with heavy metals. Heavy metals from home chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and industrial discharges may be present in higher concentrations in sewage sludge (30). These metals can accumulate in soil after application. In metropolitan settings, improperly treated or uncontrolled sewage sludge disposal can be hazardous to human health and soil quality.

4.8 Natural Weathering and Geological Processes

Through processes including erosion, leaching, and weathering, heavy metals can be released into soil via the natural weathering of parent materials and geological formations (31). Soil contamination may be more prevalent in urban areas located near naturally occurring mineral resources or geological formations that are high in heavy metals (32). Furthermore, heavy metals can be redistributed throughout landscapes by geological processes like erosion, sediment transport, and volcanic activity, which can affect the quality of soil in urban areas.

An understanding of the various sources of heavy metal contamination in urban soil is necessary to develop focused management plans that reduce pollution and safeguard the environment and public health (33). Urban regions can work towards sustainable development while reducing the dangers associated with heavy metal exposure by addressing the underlying causes of contamination and putting pollution prevention measures in place (34).

5. Distribution Patterns of Heavy Metals in Urban Soil

A complex web of interrelated elements, including past land use patterns, industrial operations, transportation networks, soil qualities, and atmospheric deposition, affect the distribution of heavy metals in urban soil. In urban environments, detecting pollution hotspots, evaluating environmental concerns, and putting targeted remediation methods into action all depend on an understanding of the spatial distribution patterns of heavy metals (35).

5.1 Spatial Variability:

The concentrations of heavy metals in urban soil vary geographically, with lower levels of contamination being scattered among smaller, more localised hotspots of contamination (36). The closeness to sources of pollution, such as major roads, industrial facilities, and waste disposal sites, as well as differences in soil qualities, land use types, and urban growth patterns, all have an impact on this variability. When compared to residential or recreational areas, urban areas with a history of industrial activity or significant traffic typically show greater levels of heavy metal contamination (37).

5.2 Depth Profiles

Because contaminant mobility within soil profiles is governed by processes of deposition, migration, and accumulation, the distribution of heavy metals in urban soil varies with depth. Because surface soils are closest to sources of pollution and are subjected to more air deposition, vehicle emissions, and human activity, they tend to acquire higher amounts of heavy metals (38). The top 10 to 30 centimetres of soil are frequently affected. Subsurface soils, on the other hand, might have lower contamination levels, even though underground infrastructure or deeply ingrained plants could serve as conduits for the migration of heavy metals into deeper soil layers.

5.3 Land Use Influence

The distribution of heavy metals in urban soil is shaped in large part by land use trends. Compared to residential or green settings, industrial and commercial zones, which are defined by manufacturing facilities, transportation hubs, and intense industrial operations, frequently have greater concentrations of heavy metals. Parks, recreation spaces, and greenbelts (39), on the other hand, might have lower contamination levels; nonetheless, the local soil quality may be impacted by past land uses or proximity to contaminated sources.

5.4 Proximity to Pollution Sources

The geographical distribution of heavy metals in urban soil is significantly influenced by the distance from recognised sources of pollution, such as waste disposal sites, major highways, and industrial facilities (40). Heavy metals from pollution sources are released into the environment, causing higher concentrations in the soil and sediment nearby. Heavy metal concentrations usually decrease with increasing distance from pollution sources, while atmospheric deposition and transit routes may cause extensive contamination outside of the immediate source locations (41).

5.5 Soil Properties

The characteristics of soil, including its texture, pH, mineral content, and organic matter concentration, are important in determining how heavy metals are distributed in urban soil (42). The adsorption and retention of heavy metals are influenced by the texture of the soil; clay-rich soils usually have higher binding capabilities than sandy soils. Heavy metals are absorbed by organic matter, which alters the metals' mobility and bioavailability in soil. Furthermore, the speciation of heavy metals is influenced by the pH of the soil; acidic soils tend to increase the solubility and mobility of specific metals (43).

5.6 Meteorological and Environmental Factors

Through processes including atmospheric deposition, erosion, and leaching, meteorological and environmental factors, such as fluctuations in temperature, wind direction, and rainfall patterns, can affect the distribution patterns of heavy metals in urban soil. Heavy metals from contaminated surfaces can be mobilised by rainfall events and then transported by runoff and infiltration to adjacent soil and water bodies. Heavy metal deposition can occur widely in urban areas due to wind-driven particulate matter dispersal, especially downwind of industrial or traffic sources (44).

5.7 Historical Legacy

Urban soil can get contaminated with heavy metals for decades or even centuries as a result of past land use, industrial, and waste management practices. Groundwater and nearby soil may contain higher concentrations of heavy metals due to continuous contamination from brownfields, abandoned landfills, and former industrial sites. Prioritising remediation operations in urban contexts and evaluating the long-term effects of heavy metal contamination require an understanding of the historical context of urban growth (45).

Through the characterization of heavy metal distribution patterns in urban soil and the identification of factors that impact their spatial variability, policymakers and researchers can devise focused approaches for pollution monitoring, risk assessment, and remediation. Comprehensive soil management techniques, pollution control methods, and land use planning techniques can all be used to lessen the threats heavy metal contamination poses to the environment and human health in metropolitan areas (46).

6. Chemical Composition and Speciation of Heavy Metals

The complex interactions between the species and chemical makeup of heavy metals in the dynamic urban soil ecosystem are being studied in great detail by scientists, with significant consequences for both human health and environmental sustainability. Heavy metals are pervasive pollutants of concern amid the patchwork of human activities that define metropolitan landscapes, from industrial operations and vehicle emissions to past land uses and waste disposal practices. Lead (Pb), cadmium (Cd), mercury (Hg), arsenic (As), chromium (Cr), and nickel (Ni) are only a few of the infamous contaminants. The subtleties of their chemical behaviour and interactions within the heterogeneous matrix of urban soils are a puzzle that deserves careful investigation (47).

Heavy metals display a wide range of chemical combinations and forms at the molecular level, which precisely control their bioavailability and environmental fate. The solubility and mobility of inorganic species, including lead and mercury, in soil matrices are determined by their stable organometallic complexes, which are formed by complexation with organic ligands or chelators (48). Furthermore, the distribution and partitioning of heavy metal ions within the soil profile are further regulated by the phenomena of sorption, in which the metals adsorb onto the surfaces of mineral phases or soil colloids via surface complexation or electrostatic interactions. Numerous parameters, such as soil pH, organic matter content, mineralogy, and redox conditions, control this interfacial phenomena and work together to orchestrate the complex dance of heavy metal speciation in the urban soil milieu.

The contribution of microbial communities living in urban soils is particularly important since changes in heavy metal speciation are caused by transformative processes that are catalysed by their metabolic activities. For example, chromium (Cr) oxidation state can be modulated by microbially mediated redox transformations, which can lead to the reduction of deadly hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) to less mobile and less toxic trivalent chromium (Cr(III)) species. This microbial alchemy creates feedback loops that impact the ecological dynamics of urban soil ecosystems in addition to affecting the bioavailability and toxicity of heavy metals (49).

Researchers use a wide range of analytical techniques, including as synchrotron-based X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) and X-ray fluorescence (XRF) imaging, in their quest to understand the complexities of heavy metal speciation. These state-of-the-art methods shed light on the molecular mechanisms behind the environmental behaviour and ecological consequences of heavy metal species in urban soil matrices by providing hitherto unheard-of insights into their spatial distribution, chemical bonding, and valence state.

With such molecular-level knowledge at their disposal, policymakers and urban planners may create sophisticated remediation plans that go beyond traditional thinking and incorporate cutting-edge techniques like phytoremediation, bioaugmentation, and nano-enabled remediation technologies. Through the effective use of scientific research, technological advancement, and policy changes, society can successfully negotiate the challenging landscape of heavy metal pollution in urban soils and pave the way for a sustainable future where human well-being and environmental stewardship coexist peacefully in the furnace of urbanisation and industrialization (50).

7. Health Risks Associated with Heavy Metal Contamination

The potential health hazards linked to heavy metal pollution in urban soil are numerous and include a range of detrimental impacts on human health, from acute toxicity to long-term illnesses. Lead (Pb), cadmium (Cd), mercury (Hg), arsenic (As), chromium (Cr), and nickel (Ni) are among the heavy metals that are well-known for their toxicological characteristics and capacity to negatively affect different organ systems in the human body.

Lead is a common environmental contaminant that can be found in leaded petrol, industrial emissions, and crumbling paint in older buildings. It is especially dangerous for children's neurological development. Lead exposure, even at low levels, can have long-term effects that persist throughout adulthood, including reduced IQ, behavioural issues, and impaired cognitive function. The burden of disease is further enhanced by the fact that lead exposure is linked to harmful cardiovascular consequences, such as hypertension and an increased risk of myocardial infarction.

The main industrial sources of cadmium include metal smelting, battery production, and phosphate fertilisers. Cadmium is well-known for its nephrotoxic effects and ability to harm kidneys when exposed to high levels over an extended period of time (51). Over time, cadmium builds up in the kidneys, impairing renal function and hastening the development of chronic kidney disease (CKD), a crippling illness with high morbidity and fatality rates. Additionally, because cadmium interferes with calcium metabolism and bone mineral density, it has been related to osteoporosis. This increases the risk of fractures and skeletal abnormalities.

Depending on the chemical type and route of exposure, mercury, which is released from sources such trash incineration, artisanal gold mining, and coal combustion, poses a variety of health hazards. Methylmercury poses a threat to human health as it is a strong poison that develops in fish and shellfish due to microbial methylation in aquatic habitats. Maternal ingestion of tainted seafood during pregnancy can expose the foetus to methylmercury, which can cause developmental neurotoxicity (52). This can show up as attention and memory problems, delayed psychomotor development, and reduced cognitive function. Furthermore, immune system dysfunction, reproductive toxicity, and cardiovascular illness have all been linked to mercury exposure.

Derived from mining operations, agricultural pesticides, and geological sources, arsenic is a well-known carcinogen linked to a higher risk of several cancers, including skin, lung, bladder, and liver cancer. Arsenicosis is the collective term for a group of non-cancerous health problems that can be brought on by chronic exposure to arsenic through contaminated drinking water or food sources. These effects include peripheral neuropathy, skin lesions, and cardiovascular disease. Arsenic exposure during pregnancy has also been connected to poor birth outcomes, such as low birth weight, premature birth, and developmental defects (53).

Chromium is a common element in industrial operations like textile manufacture, leather tanning, and stainless steel production. It can be found in several oxidation states, with hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) being a strong carcinogen. Lung cancer and other respiratory conditions are dangers associated with occupational exposure to airborne chromium compounds, especially in industries like welding and chromate manufacture. Furthermore, hexavalent chromium can exacerbate occupational health risks by causing skin sensitivity and dermatitis following dermal contact.

Emissions of nickel from sources such as the production of stainless steel, the processing of metals, and the burning of fossil fuels increase the risk of respiratory toxicity and carcinogenicity, especially in occupational contexts where there is a high level of airborne nickel exposure. Dust or fumes containing nickel can cause allergic asthma, chronic bronchitis, and lung disorders related to the workplace. These conditions can have long-term effects on respiratory health and quality of life. Furthermore, exposure to nickel has been linked to a higher incidence of lung and nasal cancer, underscoring the heavy metal pollutant's carcinogenic potential (54).

In summary, there are numerous and widespread health hazards linked to heavy metal poisoning in urban soil, including impacts on the nervous system, kidneys, heart, developing lungs, and cancer. A multimodal strategy that includes strong regulatory controls, focused remediation plans, public health activities, and community involvement programmes is required to mitigate these hazards. Society may work towards a future where urban environments promote prosperity and well-being for all by addressing the intricate interactions between environmental degradation, human health, and social fairness.

8. Exposure Pathways and Vulnerable Populations

There are many different ways that people might be exposed to heavy metal contamination in urban soil, making it possible for them to come into touch with these harmful pollutants in different ways. Comprehending these pathways is crucial in discerning susceptible groups and executing focused therapies to efficiently alleviate health hazards.

1.Ingestion: Eating food that has been cultivated in polluted soil or dust is one of the main ways that one can become exposed. Children are especially susceptible to this pathway because they frequently put their hands in their mouths and play near the ground. Moreover, if soil contamination exists, urban gardening techniques like growing vegetables inside may increase the danger of exposure.

2. Inhalation: Another important route of exposure is from inhaling airborne particulate matter, such as dust and aerosols tainted with heavy metals. This is particularly true in crowded urban environments with plenty of traffic or industrial activity. During production processes, workers in industries handling heavy metals run the risk of breathing in airborne pollutants.

3. Dermal Contact: In certain situations, such as work environments or leisure pursuits like gardening or landscaping, direct contact with polluted soil or dust can lead to the dermal absorption of heavy metals. Though less so than ingesting and inhalation routes, skin contact with contaminated water or surfaces may also lead to exposure.

4. Occupational Exposure: Because they handle or process polluted materials directly, workers in sectors like waste management, construction, mining, and metal processing are more likely to be exposed to heavy metals at work. Exposure hazards among these populations may be increased by inadequate occupational safety practices and personal protective equipment (PPE).

5. Residential Proximity: Living close to trash disposal sites, industrial facilities, or busy roadways can raise your chance of coming into contact with contaminated urban soil that contains heavy metals. Communities that are close to these sources may have higher than average concentrations of heavy metals in their soil, air, and water. This could put residents' health at risk, especially those who are more susceptible, like children, expectant mothers, the elderly, and people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Exposure to heavy metal poisoning in urban soil disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, such as children, pregnant women, the elderly, those with weakened immune systems, and people with pre-existing medical disorders. Due to their growing organ systems, higher ingestion rates compared to body weight, and increased hand-to-mouth action, children are especially vulnerable (55). Furthermore, exposure to heavy metals during pregnancy can affect foetal development and raise the possibility of unfavourable birth outcomes. These consequences can last across generations.

Due to the possibility of heavy metal transfer across the placenta, which can impact foetal development and have long-term health effects on both the mother and the child, pregnant women are also more vulnerable. Exposure to heavy metals can worsen the health impacts for the elderly and those with pre-existing disorders, such as respiratory or renal ailments, which can further jeopardise their general well-being (56).

Conclusively, comprehending the many routes of exposure to heavy metal pollution in urban soil and pinpointing susceptible groups are essential measures in reducing health hazards and executing focused measures to safeguard public health. Ensuring the safety and welfare of urban populations at danger of heavy metal contamination requires thorough risk assessments, community involvement programmes, and regulatory actions.

9. Assessment of Health Risks

A thorough investigation of exposure pathways, vulnerability dynamics, and methodological frameworks is necessary to assess the health risks associated with heavy metal contamination in urban environments. These steps must be supported by a sophisticated understanding of environmental toxicology and public health epidemiology. In urban environments, heavy metals can enter ecosystems through a variety of routes. These include ingesting contaminated water or soil, breathing in airborne particulates from vehicles or industrial processes, and coming into contact with polluted surfaces through skin contact. Each of these pathways carries a unique set of risks and mechanisms of exposure (57). Targeted risk assessment strategies that take into account the complex interactions between biological susceptibilities, behavioural patterns, and social determinants of health are necessary because vulnerable populations—which include children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with underlying health conditions—face increased risks due to these interplays.

For example, children are more likely to be exposed to heavy metals found in soil or dust, which can hinder neurodevelopment and increase the risk of cognitive impairments. This is a phenomenon that has been extensively studied in the scientific literature on developmental neurotoxicity. Children are also more likely to exhibit exploratory behaviours and increased hand-to-mouth activity. The added worry for expectant mothers is the possibility of heavy metal transfer across the placenta, which has been thoroughly researched in the field of developmental toxicology. This transfer could compromise foetal development and lead to unfavourable delivery outcomes. Furthermore, due to factors like living close to industrial facilities, having limited access to clean water and wholesome food, and having fewer healthcare resources, socioeconomically marginalised communities frequently suffer from a disproportionate burden of heavy metal exposure. These findings underscore the systemic injustices associated with environmental health disparities.

Numerous interdisciplinary and different methodologies are used to evaluate the health concerns associated with heavy metal contamination in urban environments. These methodologies draw from a wide range of scientific fields, including environmental chemistry, toxicology, epidemiology, and biostatistics (58). In order to determine the spatial distribution, temporal trends, and concentration levels of heavy metals within impacted environments, environmental monitoring initiatives involve the systematic collection and analysis of samples from soil, water, air, and biota. This is done using cutting-edge analytical techniques like high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) and inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS). In order to assess the internal dose and physiological reactions triggered by heavy metal exposure, biomonitoring efforts measure biomarkers of exposure and effect in biological samples, such as blood, urine, hair, or tissues. They do this by utilising state-of-the-art techniques like metabolomics and proteomics, which provide mechanistic insights into toxicological pathways.

In order to evaluate the likelihood and severity of adverse health effects associated with heavy metal exposure, risk assessment frameworks also offer structured methodologies for synthesising data from various sources. These methodologies include hazard identification, dose-response assessment, exposure assessment, and risk characterization. Furthermore, these frameworks integrate principles from quantitative risk assessment, decision analysis, and uncertainty analysis to inform evidence-based decision-making and risk management strategies. Stakeholders can develop a comprehensive understanding of the health risks associated with heavy metal contamination in urban environments by integrating methodological approaches and interdisciplinary perspectives. This will enable evidence-based decision-making and focused interventions that aim to reduce exposures, safeguard vulnerable populations, and advance environmental justice. In spite of the difficulties posed by heavy metal contamination, society can work to create healthier, more resilient urban environments that put human well-being and environmental sustainability first via cooperative efforts spanning scientific research, public health advocacy, community engagement, and policy development.

10. Mitigation Strategies for Heavy Contamination

Heavy metal contamination mitigation solutions require a multifaceted, all-encompassing approach that incorporates many ways to prevent, regulate, and remediate the effects of pollution in urban areas. A proactive approach to reducing the amount of heavy metals released into the environment from a variety of sources, including waste management, transportation, industry, and agriculture, is pollution prevention. This strategy calls for the use of greener production techniques, such as the application of green chemistry concepts, the streamlining of industrial processes to minimise waste production, and the promotion of resource efficiency via recycling and waste reduction programmes (59).

10.1 Pollution Prevention Measures

In order to prevent pollution, safer substitutes for toxic substances must be used; best management practices (BMPs) must be adopted in order to reduce the amount of contaminants that runoff and leach from agricultural lands; and sustainable urban development strategies that put environmental sustainability and pollution prevention first must be implemented.

10.2 Source Control and Regulation

Another essential part of mitigating heavy metal contamination is source control and regulation, which entails establishing and enforcing strict environmental standards, laws, and guidelines to restrict heavy metal emissions and discharges into the environment. This includes enforcing effluent limitations and discharge standards to prevent the release of heavy metals into water bodies through the discharge of industrial and municipal wastewater, as well as implementing emission controls, such as pollution control devices and technologies, to reduce air emissions from industrial facilities and vehicular traffic. To stop heavy metals from leaking into the environment from polluted sites and landfills, source control methods also include regulating hazardous waste management procedures like storage, treatment, and disposal.

10.3 Soil Remediation Technologies

Physical, chemical, and biological remediation approaches are among the choices available for minimising heavy metal contamination in urban soils using soil remediation technology (60). Dredging, excavation, and removal of contaminated soil from impacted locations are examples of physical remediation techniques. The contaminated soil is then treated or disposed of at the proper facilities. Chemical remediation techniques employ additives like lime, phosphate, and organic matter to either immobilise heavy metals in soil or make it easier for them to be removed by sorption, precipitation, or chemical transformation. Through techniques including phytoremediation, microbial remediation, and bioaugmentation, biological remediation options take advantage of the innate capacities of plants, microbes, and soil organisms to break down, sequester, or detoxify heavy metals in contaminated soil (61).

10.4 Land-Use Planning and Management

In order to reduce human exposure to heavy metal contamination and stop further deterioration of urban ecosystems, land-use planning and management methods are essential. In order to prevent sensitive land uses, like residential areas, schools, and parks, from being located in close proximity to known sources of heavy metal contamination, like industrial facilities, waste sites, and transportation corridors, it is necessary to implement zoning regulations, land-use restrictions, and development policies. Furthermore, land-use planning incorporates green infrastructure, urban green spaces, and brownfield redevelopment projects to improve ecological restoration, protect the environment, and establish buffer zones between sensitive receptors and industrial activity (62).

10.5 Public Education and Community Engagement

In order to combat heavy metal contamination in urban environments, public education and community engagement activities are essential for increasing awareness, empowering people, and igniting a sense of collective action. This entails creating and disseminating educational materials, outreach initiatives, and community seminars with the goal of educating locals, employees, decision-makers, and other interested parties about the dangers of heavy metal pollution and encouraging the adoption of sustainable habits and practices that will lower exposure and lessen effects. Moreover, community engagement initiatives enable affected communities to demand accountability from polluters, push for policy reforms, and work with governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders to create and carry out practical mitigation plans (63). Public education and community engagement programmes can enable communities to take proactive measures to protect public health and environmental quality in urban environments affected by heavy metal contamination by fostering a culture of environmental stewardship, knowledge-sharing, and cooperative problem-solving.

11. Result

In the complex field of heavy metal pollution in urban soil, thorough and extensive research projects are fundamental to deciphering complex dynamics, guiding evidence-based policy choices, and formulating practical mitigation plans that protect human health and the environment (64). Across a wide range of scientific disciplines, these research projects include basic studies of the physicochemical characteristics, speciation processes, and ecotoxicological effects of heavy metals in urban soil matrices. In order to understand the mechanisms of sorption, desorption, complexation, and transformation that control the fate, transport, and bioavailability of heavy metals in soil ecosystems, fundamental research explores the molecular-scale interactions between heavy metals and soil constituents. Modern analytical methods like synchrotron-based X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS), high-resolution mass spectrometry (HRMS), X-ray fluorescence (XRF), X-ray diffraction (XRD), and X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) allow for the precise characterization and speciation analysis of heavy metal pollutants, providing information on their chemical forms, oxidation states, and binding mechanisms.

Furthermore, field research and environmental monitoring programmes offer priceless empirical information about the origins, temporal patterns, and spatial distribution of heavy metal contamination in urban soil settings (65). Thorough soil sample programmes, carried out in a variety of land-use types, geographical locations, and demographic contexts, produce datasets that are critical for determining the extent of contamination, pinpointing pollution hotspots, and defining priorities for specific remediation actions. Through the use of sentinel creatures including plants, earthworms, and microbial communities, biomonitoring studies provide information about the ecological effects of heavy metal contamination (66). This information is useful for assessing the effectiveness of remediation strategies and monitoring the recovery of ecosystems over time.

The numerous issues presented by heavy metal contamination in urban contexts require interdisciplinary collaboration. Experts from a variety of disciplines, including environmental science, soil chemistry, toxicology, epidemiology, urban planning, and social science, are brought together through collaborative research networks, consortia, and partnerships. Through knowledge exchange, capacity building, and data sharing, these collaborations promote synergistic methods that incorporate specialised skills and methodology, boosting scientific understanding and guiding evidence-based decision-making processes. Stakeholder engagement programmes that involve communities, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and advocacy groups also support citizen science initiatives, community-based monitoring programmes, and participatory research approaches (67). These programmes cultivate transparency, empowerment, and trust in the research process.

Innovative approaches to study, like machine learning algorithms, GIS, and remote sensing, provide up new possibilities for risk assessment, predictive modelling, and spatial analysis of heavy metal contamination in urban settings (68). In addition to ground-based monitoring efforts, remote sensing techniques, which make use of satellite imagery, aerial surveys, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), offer important insights into trends in urban expansion, changes in land cover, and spatial patterns of pollution. They also make large-scale assessments of environmental degradation easier. In order to simulate the transport, fate, and exposure pathways of heavy metals in urban soil environments, GIS-based modelling frameworks integrate spatial data on land use, soil properties, meteorological parameters, and pollutant emissions. This allows for risk assessment and scenario analysis for well-informed decision-making.

In conclusion, interdisciplinary nature, methodological diversity, and collaborative ethos are characteristics of research initiatives in the field of heavy metal contamination in urban soil (68). These traits propel innovation, foster scientific advancement, and catalyse positive change in environmental management and public health policy. The scientific community can effectively address the complex challenges posed by heavy metal contamination in urban environments by embracing a holistic research agenda that includes fundamental science, applied research, and stakeholder engagement. This will pave the way towards sustainable, resilient, and healthy cities for future generations.

12. Conclusion

In conclusion, evaluating the presence of heavy metal contamination in urban soil and the implications for human health is an intricate and ever-evolving field of research that requires a sophisticated grasp of chemical speciation dynamics, exposure pathways, health concerns, and mitigation techniques. The origins, geographic distribution patterns, and environmental destiny of heavy metals in urban environments have been largely elucidated via thorough scientific investigation and interdisciplinary cooperation. Nonetheless, a plethora of obstacles and gaps in the literature continue to exist, highlighting the necessity of ongoing scientific investigation and evidence-based measures to address the widespread danger that heavy metal pollution poses to human health and environmental sustainability (69).

Important realisations drawn from research projects highlight the broad occurrence and diversity of heavy metal pollution in urban soil, where concentrations show both temporal and spatial variability influenced by a variety of factors such as industrial processes, land use patterns, vehicle emissions, and historical pollution legacies. The bioavailability and toxicity of heavy metals have been clarified by advanced chemical speciation investigations, which also show that the physical and chemical forms of these metals are crucial in controlling their mobility, capacity for bioaccumulation, and ecological effects. Furthermore, clarifying the routes of exposure—which include ingestion, inhalation, and skin contact—is essential to comprehending human exposure dynamics and evaluating the health risks associated with it, especially for susceptible populations like children, pregnant women, and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

The health hazards associated with heavy metal pollution in urban soil are numerous and extensively researched. They include a range of detrimental health consequences, such as neurological deficits, developmental problems, respiratory conditions, and carcinogenic consequences (70). The need for focused treatments and preventative measures is emphasised by the disproportionate burden of these health risks placed on vulnerable populations, which are defined by heightened susceptibility and uneven exposure patterns. Mitigation techniques play a crucial role in reducing human exposure to heavy metals and reducing related health hazards. These strategies include pollution control measures, regulatory frameworks, soil remediation technology, land-use planning strategies, and public education programmes.

It is recommended that future research endeavours prioritise the advancement of our understanding of the long-term effects of heavy metal poisoning on human well-being, ecological resilience, and soil quality. Novel approaches to research, including sophisticated analytical methods like high-resolution mass spectrometry, synchrotron-based spectroscopy, and molecular biology tools, present promising paths towards deciphering the complex mechanisms behind heavy metal fate and transport processes in urban soil environments (71). Transforming research findings into workable policies, interventions, and best practices that support environmental justice, safeguard public health, and advance sustainable urban development also requires interdisciplinary collaborations across domains like environmental science, soil chemistry, toxicology, epidemiology, and urban planning.

In summary, evaluating the presence of heavy metal pollution in urban soil is an important area of study for environmental and public health professionals, requiring coordinated efforts from all relevant parties in academia, government, business, and civil society. We can successfully traverse the complex issues posed by heavy metal contamination, protect human health, and maintain the integrity of urban ecosystems for both the present and the future by adopting a comprehensive and cooperative strategy to study, monitoring, and management (72).

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