

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Southside Chattanooga Lead

Chattanooga, TN



Frequently Asked Questions

2024

Q&A

Below are commonly asked questions from residents to which we have provided answers. If you have a question that has not been addressed in this document, please contact Jasmin Jefferies, the Remedial Project Manager (RPM), at Jefferies.Jasmin@epa.gov or Rosemarie Nelson, the Community Involvement Coordinator, at Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov.

Site History

Q: When was the Site proposed and listed to the National Priorities List (NPL)?

A: *The Southside Chattanooga Lead Superfund Site was proposed to the NPL in January 2018 and was listed on the NPL in September 2018.*

Q: What is the NPL, and what does it mean for a Site to be listed on the NPL?

A: *The National Priorities List (NPL) is the list of sites of national priority among the known releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants throughout the United States and its territories. The NPL is intended primarily to guide the EPA in determining which Sites warrant further investigation. When a Site is listed to the NPL, Superfund resources/monies can be used to address the contamination.*

Q: How did the yards become contaminated with lead?

A: *Since the mid-19th century, about 60 foundries, typically iron, steel, and brass, have operated within the City of Chattanooga. These foundries specialized in melting and casting metals into parts for automobiles, train locomotives, airplanes, plumbing fixtures, etc. Sand, which was commonly used as the molding for these parts, was broken away from the metal piece once the molten metal had cooled. Most of the sand was reused to make future molds, but sand fines were generated with reuse and could not be reused. Until the advent of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) in the early 1970s, facilities discarded their used waste foundry material on their own properties, sent them to local landfills, or gave them away to be used as fill material or as a topsoil layer on other properties. Some of the material that was generated at the foundries pre-RCRA has been found to be hazardous because of the high lead concentrations that are present but were unknown at the time.*

Q: When did the EPA learn of the contamination in the neighborhoods and what steps has the EPA taken to address contamination?

A: *The EPA learned of this material in 2011 after being notified by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation requesting assistance to conduct a soil assessment along Read Avenue and Mitchell Avenue. After the EPA identified elevated concentrations of lead at several residential properties along Read Avenue and Mitchell Avenue, the EPA implemented a time-critical removal action to clean-up and restore all 84 of those properties. In 2017, the EPA cleaned-up 15 properties in the Jefferson Heights subdivision. Since listing the site on the NPL in 2018, the EPA has continued its early cleanup action to clean-up and restore an additional 32 properties. As of September 2019, the EPA has sampled a total of 1,122 properties and has cleaned-up a total of 131 properties through the eight neighborhoods. Ongoing sampling and clean-ups are continuing today.*

Health Effects

Q: What are some of the health effects of lead poisoning?

A: *Lead Poisoning Can Lead to:*

- *Damage to the brain and nervous system*
- *Behavioral problems*
- *Hearing problems*
- *Slowed or stunted growth*
- *Delayed or slow learning and development*

Q: Who are most at risk for lead contamination?

A: *Children younger than six (6) years old and pregnant women have the greatest risk for health effects from lead contamination.*

Q: Should I and/or my family get a lead blood test?

A: *Getting a blood lead test is a decision that you will need to make; however, the EPA advises that if you live within the eight impacted neighborhoods, your children (of any age) should get a blood lead test. This test can be conducted through your primary healthcare physician or through your local health department.*

Q: How can one be exposed to lead in soil?

A: *Route of exposure to lead in soil include:*

- *Ingestion (swallowing) of contaminated soil and dust (especially for children, who put objects and hands in their mouths).*
- *Ingestion of unwashed foods grown in contaminated soil.*
- *Inhalation (breathing of soil particles or dust).*
- *Absorption of contaminants through the skin (low risk).*

Q: What are the warning signs of lead poisoning?

A: *Symptoms of Lead Poisoning, if they Occur, May Include:*

- Abdominal pain
- Constipation
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Irritability

Most children show no symptoms of lead poisoning. Signs of lead poisoning can often be mistaken for other illnesses.

For further health information regarding the Southside Chattanooga Lead Superfund Site, contact the Tennessee Department of Health (TDOH) at 615-741-7247 or toll free at 800-404-3006 during normal business hours or email them at eeep.health@tn.gov.

Sampling

Q: Is my yard eligible to be sampled?

A: *The EPA is currently addressing the eight known impacted neighborhoods – Alton Park, Cowart Place, East Lake, Highland Park, Jefferson Heights, Oak Grove, Richmond and Southside Gardens. If you live in any of these neighborhoods, your yard will be sampled. If you would like your property to be added to the next sampling event, please contact Jasmin Jefferies (Jefferies.Jasmin@epa.gov) or Rosemarie Nelson (Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov).*

Q: When is the next sampling event taking place?

A: *There will be sampling events until we have sampled every residential yard within the eight known impacted neighborhoods. Sampling events are scheduled when enough access has been granted to mobilize a sampling crew. If you would like to be kept up to date on future sampling events, you may join our email list by emailing Jasmin Jefferies (JefferiesJasmin@epa.gov) or Rosemarie Nelson at (Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov).*

Q: How do I give the EPA and/or its affiliate permission to sample my yard?

A: *To give the EPA and/or its affiliate permission to sample your yard, simply fill out and sign an Access Authorization form and return to the EPA by email or postal mail (whichever you prefer). You can obtain copies of Access Authorization forms online at <https://semspub.epa.gov/work/04/11133542.pdf> or you may request a copy by emailing Jasmin Jefferies (Jefferies.Jasmin@epa.gov) or Rosemarie Nelson (Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov). Please reference contact information at the end of this document for submittal of your access agreement via postal mail.*

Q: Can anyone send in a sampling access authorization form?

A: *We prefer to receive the access form from the homeowner and the tenant, if applicable. However, if the owner is not able to be reached, an access authorization form from the tenant is acceptable.*

Q: When and how will I receive my yard sampling results?

A: *You can expect to receive your sampling results within 90 days (3 months) after your yard has been sampled. Please contact Jasmin Jefferies (Jefferies.Jasmin@epa.gov) or Rosemarie Nelson (Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov), if you have not received your sampling results within this time frame.*

Q: Are the lead concentration levels that are listed in my results letter indicative of my entire yard?

A: *In most cases, yes. Depending on the size of the yard, the sample was conducted as an entire yard or broken up into sections (i.e. front yard, backyard, playground, garden, etc.). The sampling method used provides a representative lead concentration level of your entire yard or, if sampled in sections, a representative lead concentration level of that section. Only sections of your yard equal to or greater than the site-specific clean up level will need to be excavated. For properties less than ¼ acre (10,000 square feet), a representative sample of the entire yard was taken.*

Q: How will my yard be sampled to test for lead in the soil?

A: *Sampling will be conducted by hand, with a small shovel, spoon, or hand auger. Only the top four (4) inches of soil in your yard will be affected by the sampling. Samples will be taken at up to 30 spots per sampling location (i.e. entire yard, front yard, back yard, playground, garden). At each yard, we will only be collecting enough soil to fill several small jars. There may be some need to move items located in your yard to access sampling locations. The areas disturbed by the sampling will be restored to their pre-sampling state, to the maximum extent possible.*

Q: How will I know when the samples have been collected from my yard?

A: *The EPA and or its contractor will notify you by telephone at the number you provided on your Access Authorization form to schedule a date and time to conduct the sampling. If we are unable to reach you, we continue with sampling your yard unless you have indicated on your Access Authorization form that you must be present. We will make every attempt to mail out your results letter within 90 days after your yard has been sampled.*

Q: Under what conditions may my yard be re-sampled?

A: *Once a valid sample is collected by the EPA or its representatives, there is no reason to re-sample a property.*

Q: How will I know if my yard needs to be cleaned-up?

A: *The EPA will notify you of your sampling results via a mailed results letter. If your yard needs to be cleaned-up, it will be indicated in the results letter along with another access authorization request. The access authorization form is required to be filled out and signed by the property owner to warrant a clean-up. You can also find a copy of the access authorization form at this link <https://semspub.epa.gov/work/04/11133542.pdf>.*

Prevention Measures

Q: What steps do I need to take in the interim to protect myself, my family and/or pets?

A: *The EPA recommends the following:*

- *Wipe or remove your shoes on the doormat*
- *Don't eat food, chew gum, or smoke when working in the yard*
- *Damp mop floors and damp dust counters and furniture regularly*
- *Wash dogs regularly*
- *Wash children's toys regularly*
- *Wash children's hands and feet after they have been playing outside*
- *Maintain adequate grass or mulch cover*

Q: Are my kids, their friends, and/or pets safe to play in the yard?

A: *Residents should make this decision at their discretion. Should children and/or pets play in the yard, be sure to follow the precautionary steps above.*

Q: Is it safe to eat the vegetables that have been planted in the contaminated soil?

A: *Based on current risk assessment information, vegetables, **except for carrots**, are safe to eat if washed properly. Be sure to wash all vegetables with cold water and scrub them with a brush to help remove dirt. Root crops such as turnips, potatoes, and onions should be peeled before they are eaten. The lead contamination is in the soil. Currently, the EPA isn't aware of any vegetables that absorb lead, except for carrots.*

Q: Are raised-bed edible gardens safe to use if my yard is contaminated?

A: *Yes, with the assumption that clean soil has been brought in to fill the raised-beds.*

Access Authorization forms can be mailed or emailed to:

Jasmin Jefferies
U.S. EPA – Region 4
61 Forsyth Street, SW
SEMD – 11th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303-8909

Jefferies.Jasmin@epa.gov

Rosemarie Nelson
U.S. EPA – Region 4
61 Forsyth Street, SW
ORA – 14th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30303-8909

Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov

Additional Access Authorizations forms can be found at
<https://semspub.epa.gov/work/04/11133542.pdf>

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

EPA Remedial Project Manager

Jasmin Jefferies
(404) 562-8443 (office)
(404) 304-2817 (cell)
jefferies.jasmin@epa.gov

EPA Community Involvement Coordinator

Rosemarie Nelson
(404) 562-8728
Nelson.Rosemarie@epa.gov

TDEC State Project Manager

Troy Keith
(423) 634-5755
troy.keith@tn.gov

TDH Environmental Health Program Manager

Rebecca (Becky) Gorham
(615) 253-1399
rebecca.gorham@tn.gov

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

<https://www.epa.gov/superfund/southside-chattanooga-lead>