

Assessment of Exposure in the Community Surrounding the Martin Luther King/Jefferson School Construction Site

Citizens Guide

Background

In 2004-2005, the construction of a new school at the site of the Martin Luther King/Jefferson School in Trenton resulted in the release of dust from fill material that had been brought to the site. The fill contained both soil material and concrete construction debris. In addition, the fill was found to have low-to-moderate levels of lead and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). PAHs are a group of chemicals that occur naturally in coal, crude oil and gasoline. They are released into the atmosphere when fossil fuels are burned. Some PAHs are carcinogens.

Why was the study done?

The study was done to address community concerns about possible respiratory health effects from dust from the school construction site at Martin Luther King/Jefferson School into the surrounding neighborhood. The community was particularly concerned about the lead and PAHs in the fill material that had been brought into the construction site. The community wanted to know the nature and extent of the exposure that had occurred.

How were samples collected?

Soil samples were collected from the school site and dust samples were taken from inside and outside the adjacent school buildings and surrounding residences. Air samples were taken during demolition of the school building.

What did the investigation find?

The investigation found that off-site dust from construction activities was limited to within the one block distance immediately adjacent to the construction area on Evans Avenue and Southard Street, with a possible impact on Race Street. The investigation also found that samples of lead and PAHs found in the dust taken inside homes were within normal range and do not pose a public health risk. The concentration of PAHs in the dust collected outside the homes also was within the normal range of urban soil and did not show an influence from the fill material at the construction site.

Lead found in the dust samples collected outside the homes did, in some cases, show elevated levels. However, results of the study indicate that the soil from the construction site was not the source of these elevated levels but rather that the lead came from leaded paint outside the residences or from historical lead deposited in the soil from leaded gasoline used decades ago.

What can I do if my lead samples from outdoors are elevated?

The Department of Community Affairs has a program called Lead Safe NJ. This low-interest loan program is available to property owners or tenants in residential dwellings. Eligible housing includes: single-family, two-family and multiple-family dwellings, condominiums, cooperatives, single room occupancy dwellings, rooming homes, boarding homes and emergency shelters. For information about this program and how to apply for assistance, contact: Lead Safe NJ at 1-877-322-5323.

Where can I get additional information on the investigation?

For additional information or to obtain the final report, go to: <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/school-study/>

