



Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education

Planning. Guidance. Protection.

What is the Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education (CSPECE) program?

CSPECE is a program that **helps ensure child care centers are located in safe places**, so that children are not exposed to harmful chemicals from the surrounding environment.



Why is Safe Siting Important for Early Child Care Centers?

- **Children are not small adults.** Because their bodies are still developing, they can be easily disrupted by environmental chemicals. They also breathe more air, drink more water, and eat more food per their body weight than adults. Childhood exposures to harmful chemicals can have lifelong health effects.
- **A considerable amount of time is spent at child care centers.** Children may spend up to 10 hours a day, 5 days a week in care settings outside of their homes.
- **Adult staff can also be exposed to harmful chemicals.** Most child care programs are staffed by women of childbearing age. Pregnant child care staff are also potentially at risk because some chemicals can harm fetal development.

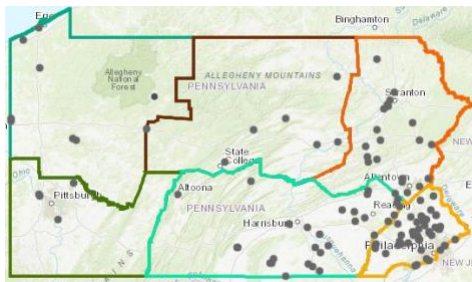
A Lesson on the Importance of Safe Siting

- **In 2004 a child care center in New Jersey was built on a vacant lot that was previously used as a mercury thermometer factory.** Mercury from the prior factory's use had not been cleaned up. It was not until 2006 that an inspection of the facility revealed mercury vapors above health guidelines, and the facility was immediately closed.
- **Even if child care centers meet all the licensing requirements,** they may be located in places where children and staff can come in contact with harmful chemicals.
- **Taking time now** to choose a safe site may help a child care owner avoid costly and time-consuming remediation in the future.

A Safe Place puts Parents and Staff at Ease and Allows Children to Thrive

Did you know?

- Across the country, most child care center programs are **not required** to conduct a site history, environmental audit, or environmental assessment to be licensed. As of 2015 **only New York and New Jersey** had specific regulatory language requiring early child care centers be chosen with consideration for environmental hazards.
- Unlike most schools, child care centers generally **do not undergo a public input process** and are allowed to be placed in or near areas of commercial or industrial use locations.
- **Certain chemical contaminants may remain at a site** long after activities that caused the contamination have stopped. **They also may be hard to notice.** Only some harmful chemicals can be smelled or tasted.
- On the other hand, **many early child care sites may be safe.** Having this **peace of mind** benefits parents, staff, and children alike.



Why Safe Siting is Important in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania has a rich industrial history with numerous properties that have been contaminated by past or current industrial use. Some of these properties have been cleaned up while others remain a possible source of contamination to child care centers.

*The map (left) shows Pennsylvania's 113 active waste sites on the Federal National Priorities List as of 2018
Source: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 2018 <https://gis.dep.pa.gov/hascaannualreport/>*

Pennsylvania is **47th of 50 states** for percentage of housing stock at risk for lead exposure. There is no safe blood lead level for children. Pennsylvania also ranks in the **top 3** in the country for number of hazardous waste sites.

Nearly 3 in 4 Pennsylvania counties are in high radon zones (>4 picocuries per liter). As with most states, **radon testing is not required prior to child care licensure.** Radon is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

What are Some Potential Sources of Environmental Contamination?

- **Former uses of the site** could have chemicals that are still present in the building, soil, air, or groundwater.
- **Nearby sites (commercial, business, industrial)** may release harmful chemicals that can migrate through air, water or soil and onto the site property.
- **Naturally-occurring contamination** may be present on the site, such as arsenic in soil or radon that can seep into indoor air.
- **Drinking water** may be at risk for lead, arsenic, copper and/or other contamination depending on its source, infrastructure, or presence of nearby activities.

If you own a child care center, Pennsylvania's Department of Health can provide guidance if we identify any known environmental hazards at your site. To find out more, email ChooseSafePlaces@pa.gov or call 717.787.3350.

