

Residential Soil Tests near Koppers

About the Health Agencies

The Alachua County Health Department (CHD), Florida Department of Health (DOH), and the US Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) serve the public by using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information about toxic chemicals at hazardous waste sites.

About the Koppers Site

The Koppers hazardous waste site is near the intersection of North 23rd Avenue and North Main Street in Gainesville. Since 1916, Koppers site owners treated utility poles and timber with chemicals to prevent decay. Past waste disposal caused soil and ground water contamination. In 1984, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) added the Cabot-Koppers site to their Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). Recently, they discovered soil contamination west of the site.

At various times since 1989, Florida DOH reviewed environmental data, found the site a potential health risk, and recommended warning signs, further testing, and restricted site access. Residents of the Stephen Foster neighborhood west of Koppers are concerned about contact with contaminated soil.

Questions and Answers

Q: What do Stephen Foster neighborhood residents need to know about the soil contamination?

A: Parents should keep children from playing in the City easement just west of Koppers.

Q: How can soil contamination harm a child?

A: Young children swallow very small amounts of soil when they put soiled fingers or toys in their mouths. Incidental ingestion (swallowing) of very small amounts of dioxin-contaminated surface soil from the City easement just west of Koppers for more than a year could possibly harm children's health.

Q: What is the health risk to adults?

A: When working outside, adults can also swallow very small amounts of soil when they fail to wash their hands before eating or smoking. At worst, incidental ingestion (swallowing) of soil with the highest dioxin levels in the City easement just west of Koppers over a lifetime (70 years) may result in a "low" increased theoretical risk of cancer. The actual risk, however, is likely lower and may be as low as zero.

To put this risk estimate into perspective, the background rate for all cancers in the US is about 1 in 3. This means that for every 10,000 people in the US, approximately 3,333 are expected to be diagnosed with some form of cancer during their lifetime. Lifetime exposure to the highest dioxins levels in the easement west of Koppers may increase the expected number of cancers in a population of 10,000 people from 3,333 cases to 3,336 cases.

Q: What do the health agencies recommend?

A: In addition to keeping children from playing in the City easement just west of Koppers, the health agencies recommend US EPA work with the site owner to test more surface soil west of Koppers.

Q: Who should I contact if I think toxins have affected my health?

A: You should see your doctor if you suspect toxic chemicals have affected your health.

Q: Is there a health risk from vapors or airborne dust? Is it safe to leave my windows open?

A: Without air testing or air modeling, we can not estimate the health risk from vapors or airborne dust. We recommend EPA require the site owner test or estimate vapor and airborne dust concentrations. As with any airborne dust, residents should avoid prolonged exposure.

Q: Is our water supply safe?

A: Most Stephen Foster neighborhood homes use municipal water which is routinely tested and safe to drink. Since 1984, the Alachua CHD has tested the few nearby homes still using private wells and not found contamination above drinking water standards.

Q: Is it safe to walk around outside without shoes? Is it safe for children to play in the yard?

A: Although dioxins and polycyclic aromatic chemicals can be absorbed by the skin, incidental ingestion (swallowing) the contaminated soil is the greater risk. So far, only children playing in the City easement just west of Koppers may be at risk. Therefore, parents should keep children from playing in this easement. More testing is needed, however, to determine the full extent of the soil contamination.

Q: Is it safe to cut my grass? Is it safe to dig in my yard?

A: Initial tests show the most contaminated soil is confined to the City easement just west of Koppers, However, until the full extent of contamination is known, residents should avoid prolonged exposure to dust from mowing and wash their hands after working in the yard.

Q: Is it safe to eat fruits and vegetables from my garden?

A: The chemicals found in the neighborhood near Koppers are not very water soluble and don't tend to accumulate in plants. However, you should always rinse fruits and vegetables before eating.

Q: How does rain affect the toxins in the soil?

A: Chemicals found in the neighborhood near Koppers stick tightly to soil particles. Unless heavy rains cause soil erosion, these contaminants are not likely to move.

Q: What type of precautions should I take for my pets?

A: You should consult a veterinarian about the health of your pets.

Q: When will I get more health information?

A: By the end of July, Florida DOH/ATSDR will complete a formal report evaluating the Stephen Foster soil test results. The report will be at <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/SUPERFUND/pha.htm>. Florida DOH/ATSDR will also review additional soil test results as they become available. Later this summer, Florida DOH/ATSDR will review recent tests of sediment in Springstead and Hogtown Creeks. For more health information contact:

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Q: How can I get more information about testing and cleanup of the Koppers site?

A: Contact Scott Miller, US Environmental Protection Agency: 404 562-9120 or miller.scott@epamail.epa.gov

