
NEWS RELEASE

*Issued jointly by the
Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Public Health
Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality*

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Elevated Lead Levels Found in Nine Yards in Lincoln; Meeting Scheduled

The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality sent letters this week to the owners and occupants of properties in the North Bottoms neighborhood, informing them that initial testing found elevated lead in 9 out of 20 yards tested. The properties are between 7th and 10th streets, from T to Y streets, and a half-block area east of 10th and Y. (See attached map.)

Testing was conducted because the area is located near the site of the former Northwestern Metal Company at 900 T and 920 U streets, which operated between approximately 1918 and 1961. The focus of the investigation was historic air emissions from their lead smelter.

DEQ, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department are holding a joint information session on Tuesday, June 18, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Welfare Society Inc. Hall, 1430 N. 10th Street, to explain sampling results, potential next steps and actions residents can take to minimize exposure to lead in the soil.

Out of 70 selected residential properties, DEQ received permission to sample in 20 of them.

“The data that was collected is very preliminary information,” said NDEQ Director Mike Linder. “Soil sample results show the presence of lead and the need to better define the situation.”

In March and April, a DEQ contractor collected soil samples from the North Bottoms neighborhood properties and from property in the former site of Northwestern Metal Co., which is now owned by the University of Nebraska.

In the residential properties tested, lead was found in surface samples above 400 parts per million (ppm) in non-drip zone areas in nine yards (drip zones are areas within six feet of homes and other structures that can have elevated lead levels because of historical use of lead-based paint). Lead contamination was also found under the surface of a UNL parking lot.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends further investigation of residential soil if lead levels exceed 400 ppm. NDEQ will be working with the EPA to determine further sampling and actions to be taken.

There are measures that can be taken to reduce exposure to lead in soil. Children under 7 years of age and fetuses are the most susceptible to the negative of lead, due to their developing nervous systems, according to DHHS.

DHHS recommends:

- Children under 7 years of age and pregnant women should avoid contact with bare soil areas.
- Bare soil areas in the yard should be covered with grass, mulch, gravel, sand, or other landscaping material to prevent direct contact with soil. Special attention should be paid to playground areas.
- Adults and children should wash their hands prior to eating.
- Shoes that come into contact with bare soil should be removed prior to entering the home. Shoes should remain outdoors or in a garage to avoid tracking soil into the home.
- Home gardens and play areas should not be located within three feet of a home's foundation for homes built prior to 1978, due to potential exposure to lead-based paint contaminated soil.
- Homegrown produce should be washed thoroughly prior to ingestion.

A Fact Sheet with additional information is attached.

A map of the area is attached.

For more information, contact:

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