

Choose Safe Places: Georgia Safe Siting Program Guidelines



Keeping children safe
where they grow,
learn + play.

Table of Contents

What Is Safe Siting?.....	1
Chemical Hazards and the Environment	1
Four Key Considerations for Safe Siting	2
Safe Siting Screening	5
What to Know Before You Purchase or Lease.....	6
Helpful Resources	8

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Choose Safe Places: Georgia Safe Siting Program

Selecting the right location for your child care center is essential to protect children's health and ensure the success of your business. The Georgia Safe Siting Program is designed to help child care center applicants make safer siting decisions through education and awareness. Minimize the risk to your business by carefully considering your location.

What is Safe Siting?

When exploring potential sites for a child care center, operators may not be aware that children and staff can come into contact with dangerous environmental chemicals like volatile organic compounds (VOCs), lead, arsenic, mercury, and pesticides as a result of current or past historical land use.

The location – or site – of a child care center can influence the potential types and amounts of chemical exposures that children may receive while under care. Even if child care centers meet current state licensing regulations, they may be located in places where children and staff can be exposed to environmental contamination. A new program might open in a contaminated industrial building that was never cleaned up, or next door to a dry cleaner or nail salon using harmful chemicals. Safe siting considers locating a property or building that is free from threat of potential exposures to hazardous chemicals early in the process of getting established and licensed. Locating child care centers on sites free of chemical and physical hazards, or where those hazards have been identified and addressed, best protects children's health.

Did You Know?

Children are more at risk from exposures to harmful substances than adults?

- Children are not small adults.
- Their developing brains and bodies are more vulnerable to harmful chemicals
- Children drink more water and breathe more air relative to their body size than adults do.
- Crawling and hand-to-mouth behavior can increase children's exposure to toxic chemicals in the environment, which can have long-term impacts.

Chemical Hazards and the Environment

Children regularly face hazards where they live, learn and play, many of which originate from interactions with the environment. We use chemicals every day to help us grow food, control pests, drive cars, and manufacture products. However, exposure to some of these

chemicals can be dangerous. Chemicals in the air we breathe, water we drink, or things we touch can potentially cause harm. Because children are still growing and developing, they are uniquely susceptible to health threats from environmental exposures. These early exposures can trigger diseases and disrupt development, learning, and behavior. Many children spend large amounts of time in child care facilities, so it's important to take action to make these spaces safe from harmful environmental exposures.

Four Key Considerations for Safe Siting

1. Former use of the site. Do you know if toxic chemicals were previously produced, used, stored or disposed of at the site?

Contaminants from former use of the property can stay in the environment for a long time, even after the cause of the contamination has stopped. Knowing what the property was previously used for can help identify contaminants. Just because a property was used for something in the past does not mean it is not safe, these are just considerations and further investigation that could be useful. If it is discovered that harmful chemicals were ever made, used or dumped at or near the location in the past, it is important to ensure that these chemicals were cleaned up properly and don't pose a health risk from exposure.

Examples of businesses and industries that have the potential to use harmful chemicals include:

- Dry Cleaner
- Gas Station
- Auto Repair/Auto Painting Shop
- Landfill/Dump
- Factory/Manufacturing/Industrial
- Funeral Home
- Nail Salon
- Farming/Agriculture
- Shooting Range
- Metal Plating

Examples of items on the property to look for include:

- Metal drums or barrels
- Old cars or vehicle parts
- Construction and demolition debris

To learn more about the past use of your location, check historical property records and speak with the landlord if you are planning to rent.

Not all past site use will present a problem for child care center locations. Identifying sites with problematic past use that pose as a potential risk of chemical exposure is critical to protecting the health of children.

2. Nearby sites and activities. Are you aware of any current use of toxic chemicals from neighboring businesses?

Former use of a site is not the only potential contributor to environmental contaminants. When considering a site for a child care center, it is important to observe nearby sites and activities that might create environmental exposures.

Since chemicals can stay in the environment for a long time, they are able to move to neighboring buildings. Are there nearby businesses using chemicals? If the building shares a ventilation system with a business like a nail salon, children could be exposed to high levels of chemicals in the air. Underground storage tanks from a gas station could leak and expose children to gasoline in playground soils, or in indoor air from vapor intrusion if shallow groundwater is contaminated.

Some nearby sites that might warrant attention include the following:

- Designated hazardous waste sites (examples: National Priorities List or Superfund sites, state listed sites, brownfields properties, other hazardous waste sites).
- Nearby business, service, or facility that might release hazardous materials into the environment (examples: auto repair, hair or nail salon, gas station, factory, farm).
- Transportation infrastructure that could result in a greater risk of hazardous exposures (examples: rail routes carrying harmful substances, transportation transfer points, trucking facilities).
- Threats posed by chemical contaminants migrating on-site to your child care center location from run-off, flooding, wind erosion, or vapor intrusion.

3. The presence of naturally-occurring hazards. Do potentially harmful, naturally-occurring substances exist on the property? Like radon or arsenic?

In addition to man-made chemicals, it is important to be aware that naturally-occurring hazards may be present at your site. Naturally occurring contamination comes from substances already in the environment, rather than from chemicals or other hazardous materials used or manufactured by humans. Radon is a well-known naturally occurring

Did You Know?

Naturally occurring contaminants might be in the soil, water, or air on or near a proposed site, such as:

- Soil - *Might contain arsenic or lead.*
- Groundwater - *Might contain arsenic or uranium.*
- Indoor Air - *Might contain radon.*

hazardous substance that can enter into indoor air from cracks in the foundation or slab, crawlspaces and sewer pipes. Naturally occurring contamination can be as hazardous as contamination from human activities.

Human activities sometimes create conditions allowing exposure to a naturally occurring contaminant. For example, a mining operation might disturb naturally occurring contaminants in soil and rock. Rainwater might then wash contaminants such as lead out of exposed piles of soil and rock. The lead was naturally occurring

but only became a problem when human activity disturbed it. Naturally occurring chemical contaminants might be on the property or a nearby site. If on a nearby site, the chemical contaminants might eventually migrate to the child care center at levels that could cause harm to children or facility staff by way of groundwater or air.

4. **Access to safe drinking water.** Does the site have a well that will be used for providing drinking water? Has this well been tested for drinking water quality standards? Is the water safe to drink?

It is important to know that your staff and children have a safe source of water for drinking, washing hands, and preparing food. This includes knowing that your pipes and fixtures are lead-free, and knowing that the water is free of chemicals and microbial contaminants (like bacteria and parasites). Children are especially vulnerable to chemical contaminants in drinking water because they consume more water for their body size than do adults.

Through a memorandum of understanding with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, the Georgia Department of Public Health may regulate water wells that are used as potable water supplies for permitted food service establishments, swimming pools and tourist accommodations in Georgia. Water quality for these businesses must meet compliance standards established under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. Private water wells in Georgia, however, are not subject to any regulatory authority or standards. Therefore, it is the well owner's responsibility to monitor the quality and ensure the safety of their drinking water.

In addition to an annual bacterial screening (W-35 analysis), it is recommended that a chemical screening (W-33C analysis) of well water is conducted every three years. The W-33C, also

known as the Private Well Chemical Test (PWCT), incorporates specific tests for arsenic and lead. Both tests are available through local UGA Extension Offices – <http://aesl.ces.uga.edu/>.

Test all wells for bacteria (W-35) at least once per year (especially shallow wells) and for toxic chemicals (W-33C) every three years.

Though public water systems are tested for harmful chemicals, the property owner is still responsible for the quality of the plumbing within the building. Homes and buildings built before 1986 are more likely have lead pipes, fixtures and solder. Lead can enter drinking water through the corrosion of plumbing materials, especially where the water has low mineral content or high acidity. The best way to know if a building might have elevated levels of lead in its drinking water is by testing the water in the building. Testing makes it possible to evaluate the plumbing and helps target remediation.

Other ways contaminants can get into drinking include:

- Naturally occurring elements and minerals.
- Agricultural use of fertilizers or pesticides.
- Manufacturing or industrial processes.
- Sewer overflows.
- Malfunctioning wastewater treatment systems, such as nearby septic systems.

Safe Siting Screening

To help you make the best safe siting decision, GSSP offers **FREE** screenings to child care center applicants on proposed sites. This includes applicants applying for a new license, and Child Care Learning Centers submitting applications for a change in location or change in ownership. By participating in our screening process, GSSP can help you make an informed decision on whether a location is safe for use. To screen the location of your proposed child care center, please visit our website www.dph.georgia.gov/georgia-safe-siting-program and complete a [Property History Questionnaire](#). Our staff will review your responses, along with additional information about your proposed site, and provide you with a personalized report.

Complete a Property History Questionnaire to make sure you are choosing a safe location for children! The Georgia Safe Siting Program can screen your proposed child care center, and help you identify and address common concerns at or near your location.

What to Know Before You Purchase or Lease

When was the building constructed?

In 1978, the federal government banned consumer uses of lead-containing paint. Lead from paint, including lead-contaminated dust, is one of the most common causes of lead poisoning. In young children, we know that that lead can cause:

- damage to the brain and nervous system
- slowed growth and development
- learning and behavior problems
- hearing and speech problems

Asbestos, a material that can cause lung cancer, was widely used in construction before 1977 and is still in limited use today. Removing or fully encapsulating materials containing lead or asbestos will help keep children safe. Have a certified lead-based paint consultant test the building before you commit. Have the building inspected by an accredited asbestos inspector before you commit.

To find professionals in your area, visit the Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division website – www.epd.georgia.gov.

Has the property ever been tested for radon?

Radon is a naturally occurring, radioactive gas that is produced by the natural breakdown of uranium in rock, soil and water. Odorless, colorless and tasteless, radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. Radon can easily enter homes and buildings through cracks in the foundation and well water. The only way to know if radon exist is to test. Have your property tested for radon before committing to it.

You can purchase a radon test kit from a local retailer or order one from UGA Extension – www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/home-radon.

What is the source of drinking water?

Public drinking water systems are regulated and tested to ensure safety. Private wells can be contaminated from outside sources. Have the water tested and the well inspected before moving forward with operations. Include annual testing of well water in your budget to ensure the safety of your drinking water.

You can view the UGA Extension Fee Schedule for a complete listing of available tests and prices online – <http://aesl.ces.uga.edu/>.

Has a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment ever been prepared for this property?

There are numerous risks involved with starting your own business. One risk that can be costly is having hazardous waste contamination discovered on property you have recently acquired. Performing an environmental site assessment prior to acquiring a property can minimize that risk.

Phase I Environmental Site Assessments were developed to evaluate environmental issues at any site previously used for commercial purposes. They can help protect property owners from legal liability if there are dangerous chemicals left on the property from previous owners. Many banks will require a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment before giving a loan to buy property. If potential concerns are found in the Phase I assessment, a follow-up Phase II or Phase III assessment may be done.

Even if a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment is not required for your property, getting one done can protect your business. You will also be able to rely on the skills of your hired environmental consultant when dealing with any issues that might come up.

Does the property use a septic system?

Septic systems require upkeep and are usually designed for standard household use. An updated or enlarged system may be needed to meet the demands of your child care facility. Find out how old the system is and when it was last serviced. Check the design to make sure that your child care business won't overload the system's capacity. Your local county health department can help you find the permit on file. Include the costs of proper maintenance in your budgeting.

Contact your County Environmental Health Office for more information on septic systems – <https://dph.georgia.gov/environmental-health>.

Helpful Resources

Chemical Hazards

Georgia Department of Public Health

Chemical Hazards Program

www.dph.georgia.gov/chemical-hazards

Lead and Mold

Georgia Department of Public Health

Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

www.dph.georgia.gov/healthy-homes-and-lead-poisoning-prevention

Radon

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

Radon Education Program

www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/home-radon

Drinking Water

Georgia Environmental Protection Division

Watershed Protection Branch

www.epd.georgia.gov/watershed-protection-branch

Soil and Water Analysis

University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

Agricultural and Environmental Services Laboratories

<http://aesl.ces.uga.edu/>

Septic Tanks and On-Site Sewage

Georgia Department of Public Health

Wastewater Management Program

www.dph.georgia.gov/wastewater-management

Injury Prevention

Georgia Department of Public Health

Injury Prevention Program

www.dph.georgia.gov/injury-prevention-program

Asbestos

Georgia Environmental Protection Division

Land Protection Branch

www.epd.georgia.gov/asbestos

Licensing Process

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

www.decal.ga.gov/

Children and Environmental Hazards

Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit

Southeast PEHSU - Region 4

www.pediatrics.emory.edu/centers/pehsu/index.html

Choose Safe Places Toolkit

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/safeplacesforECE/