Community Notice
Christopher Dena Elementary School
Discovery of Lead Impacted Soil

Why was the soil tested for lead?

Following the Lineage Fire in Boyle Heights, OEHS began sampling air, dust, and soil at schools within a 3-mile radius for a variety of toxic substances commonly resulting from burning buildings to assess any potential health concerns resulting from the fire. All air samples and dust wipe samples collected at the Christopher Dena Elementary School campus were satisfactory, indicating no immediate health or safety issues relating to the fire. One shallow soil sample collected in a tree well located along the southern perimeter of the campus, adjacent to the Lou Costello Jr. Recreation Center revealed an elevated concentration of lead greater than the California Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) Residential Screening Level (RSL) for lead in soil. For additional information about the OEHS study following the Lineage Fire, please visit the LA Unified website at: https://oehs.lausd.org/apps/pages/BoyleHeightsFire.

Did the fire cause this?

Though this discovery of lead at the campus was made as part of a study in response to the Lineage fire, there is no indication that lead was deposited because of that incident. Finding elevated lead concentrations in soil is common throughout Los Angeles. There are many potential sources (historically leaded fuel from nearby roads and freeways, lead-based paints, nearby commercial and industrial operations, etc.) that likely contributed to the lead concentrations discovered at the Christopher Dena campus.

Why are portions of campus fenced off?

Due to this discovery, additional samples were collected revealing more areas with lead concentrations above the RSL in two tree wells adjacent to the previously sampled tree well. Existing soil sampling data from other parts of the campus show that the elevated lead concentrations are limited to this area. Temporary fences have been placed to prevent students, staff, and the greater community from contacting the impacted soil while a soil remediation plan is developed.

What is lead, and is it dangerous?

Lead (Pb) is a naturally occurring heavy metal that was widely used in the past in products like paint, gasoline, and industrial materials, which is why it's still commonly found in soil today. Unlike some contaminants, lead does not break down in the environment. Because of this, the DTSC has set a conservative residential screening level of 80 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg) for soils. Levels of lead in soil above this number do not necessarily indicate a health hazard but require further evaluation - which is exactly what is taking place. More information on lead contamination in soil can be found on the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) website at https://www.epa.gov/lead/lead-soil.

What is being done to deal with the lead?

As an immediate measure, lead-impacted areas have been fenced to further protect the health of students, staff, and the Christopher Dena Elementary School community. The impacted soil will be removed. This work will be done when students are not present.

How will the lead-impacted soil be removed from campus?

Shallow, lead-impacted soil will be removed with hand tools and excavation equipment, loaded onto trucks, and transported to a waste facility for proper disposal. LA Unified will perform dust monitoring during excavation to ensure that lead-impacted soil doesn't spread into the campus or community as dust. Additionally, excavation will take place when students are not on campus.

What safety measures are in place to safeguard the health and safety of Christopher Dena students and staff?

1) Fencing has been placed around unpaved areas with known lead impacts or in areas pending lab results. Students and staff should keep out of these fenced areas.
2) Work to remediate lead-impacted soil will be completed when students are not present.
3) Air monitoring will be conducted during excavation and removal.

How can I stay informed?

This community notice will be updated as new information is available, or conditions change at the on campus. It will be posted on the LA Unified website (https://oehs.lausd.org/) and shared with the Christopher Dena Elementary School administrators.

Who can I contact with specific issues or concerns?

LAUSD Office of Environmental Health and Safety
OEHS Call Center: 213-241-3199
Email: OEHSQuestions@lausd.net