

EPA's School Siting Guidelines – Fact Sheet

Why is it important to consider environmental factors in choosing a location for a new school?

Everyone - parents, communities, and education, environment and health agencies - shares the vital responsibility and interest in protecting the health of children in every possible way, including protecting them from environmental risks where they go to school.

Children, particularly younger children, are uniquely at risk from environmental hazards. They eat, drink and breathe more in proportion to their body size than adults. In addition, environmental contaminants may affect children disproportionately because their immune, respiratory and other systems are not fully developed, and their growing organs are more easily harmed. This means they are more at risk for exposure to harmful chemicals found outside where they play and in the environment where they spend most of their time – school and home.

A well located school enhances the educational process by providing a safe and healthy environment for children, teachers and other staff. Before siting a school, it is important to determine whether a potential school site is contaminated or could be impacted by contaminants from nearby sources. EPA recommends that all properties or structures proposed for use as a school, as well as surrounding properties, be carefully evaluated for potential environmental hazards before making final decisions to use a site or structure for a school.

What are the School Siting Guidelines?

The guidelines present recommendations for evaluating the environmental and public health risks and benefits of potential school locations during the school siting process. Examples of environmental risks include onsite contamination like chemicals in soil or offsite risks like industrial facilities. A potential environmental and public health benefit is a location that's close to where students live so they can walk or bike to school.



When selecting a school location, it is important to identify and balance the environmental risks and benefits. EPA recommends that the local education agency (LEA) seek to avoid locations that have onsite contamination or are in very close proximity to pollution sources, especially collections of multiple sources, if acceptable alternatives exist within the neighborhoods being served by the school.

Why did EPA issue the guidelines?

In December 2007, Congress enacted the Energy Independence and Security Act (EISA). Subtitle E, Section 502 of EISA required EPA to develop model guidelines for the siting of school facilities that take into account:

1. The special vulnerabilities of children to hazardous substances or pollution exposures in any case in which the potential for contamination at a potential school site exists;
2. The modes of transportation available to students and staff;
3. The efficient use of energy; and
4. The potential use of a school at the site as an emergency shelter.

How can the guidelines be used?

The guidelines are intended as a resource for states, tribes, communities, school districts, parents and teachers to consider environmental factors when selecting school locations. By following the recommendations in the guidelines, LEAs, tribes and states can help provide a safe and healthy environment for children, teachers and staff.

The guidelines provide recommendations on steps to evaluate potential environmental challenges and benefits at candidate sites as well as links to numerous resources that can be useful in selection of locations for schools. The guidelines include a Quick Guide to Environmental Issues for readers to learn more about the types of environmental issues that are important to address in school siting decisions.

EPA recommends that LEAs evaluate potential environmental and public health risks and benefits of candidate school locations before a new school location is selected. The guidelines provide information to help LEAs navigate the environmental review of candidate sites, including an example of one way that the environmental review process could be organized.

Meaningful public involvement is important throughout the school siting process. The guidelines provide recommendations on public involvement. One recommendation is the formation of a school siting committee that includes representatives from the community to provide input on considering environmental factors at potential school locations.

How to get involved?

The Meaningful Public Involvement section of the guidelines has information about public involvement and describes the opportunities for meaningful public involvement at different points throughout the school siting process.

States, tribes and municipalities may have school siting regulations or guidance. The government agency that has jurisdiction over school siting varies depending on state, tribal and local authorities. If you have questions about school siting, contact your state, tribal or local education, environment and health agencies.

You can also contact the EPA Regional Schools Coordinator for your region. (Visit www.epa.gov/children and click on “Where You Live.”)

Do these guidelines apply if an existing school in my community is in a location with potential environmental hazards?

While the focus of these guidelines is on the evaluation of environmental factors in the selection of locations for new schools, there are many steps that can be taken at existing schools to help promote healthy school environments. EPA has resources and links to a number of programs at www.epa.gov/schools that are designed to help schools and communities take action to protect children’s health.

In some cases, environmental improvements at school facilities can reduce potential hazards; in other cases, such as widespread air pollution or water quality issues, a community wide approach may be called for. Community organizations, local businesses and local government can serve as important partners in addressing potential environmental concerns.

While these guidelines discuss many environmental factors of potential concern at school locations, the presence of a potential environmental hazard may not necessarily pose unacceptable risks to students and staff at an individual school.

How can I get a copy of the guidelines?

The guidelines are available at www.epa.gov/schools/siting. On the website you can read the overview for the guidelines and overviews for the main sections of the guidelines and access Frequent Questions and Links to Resources. You can also access the PDF of the full Guidelines to view, download or print.

To request a hard copy of the School Siting Guidelines (EPA-100-K-11-004), contact EPA’s National Service Center for Environmental Publications at

- Internet: www.epa.gov/nscep
- Phone: (800)490-9198
- E-Mail: nscep@bps-lmit.com
- Fax: (301)604-3408
- US Mail: U.S. EPA/NSCEP
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