TRANSCRIPT:

**Choose Safe Places: A Resource for Early Childhood Educators**

Learn how to choose a location for your child care program safe from environmental hazards and how DPH can help.

**Home**

Welcome to this short course on Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education, a program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, or DPH. Choose Safe Places is a free, voluntary program to help child care providers check for environmental hazards when opening or moving to a new location. Choose Safe Places works in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, or EEC. It is part of a national effort led by the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

To navigate this course, you can either use the navigation menu on the left to jump to a particular topic, but we recommend you use the arrows at the bottom of each screen to progress through the training in order. Select the start button to begin!

**What You Will Learn**

Whether you work at a childcare center or a family child care program, you will learn helpful information in this course.

You’ll learn about how Choose Safe Places can help when you’re opening a new program or moving to a new location.

You’ll learn about how the Choose Safe Places program supports environmental justice.

You’ll hear examples of how Choose Safe Places has helped child care programs in two Massachusetts communities.

**Learning Objectives**

After completing this short course, you will be able to:

Explain why it’s important to protect children from environmental hazards.

List four things to check when choosing a new location for a child care program.

List common environmental hazards that can be avoided when choosing a new location.

Identify contacts and resources to help you check for environmental hazards.

Information about the resources mentioned throughout this short course is provided in the Safe Siting Resources Sheet, available for download by clicking on the Resources link at the top right corner of the screen.

**Keeping Children Safe**

Chemicals are more harmful to children than to adults. That’s because:

Children’s brains are still developing.

They drink more water and breathe more air for their size.

They play on the ground and put their hands and objects in their mouths.

Exposure to toxic chemicals can hurt children’s development, learning, and behavior.

Choosing the right location for your child care program will protect children's health and help your business succeed. The Choose Safe Places program offers free resources and assistance to keep children safe from toxic chemicals. You can request our help checking for environmental hazards by visiting the program website and filling out a property questionnaire.

**Checking for Hazards**

You might not think about harmful chemicals at a property or building for a child care program. But sometimes, harmful chemicals come from nearby businesses or activities, or they could have been left behind by activities that took place in the past.

Here are four things to check before choosing a new location. We’ll describe each in more detail in the following slides:

1. How was the building used in the past?
2. Are there nearby contaminated properties or businesses that use chemicals?
3. Is the drinking water safe?
4. Are there harmful chemicals that occur naturally?

**Past use**

Past businesses at the site might have used or disposed of harmful chemicals. Some past uses can leave behind contamination. It can be hard to tell what a building was used for in the past just by looking at it.

Here’s what you can do:

Look for specific visual clues, not just in the building, but around the entire property.

Gas stations, auto repair shops, dry cleaners, and factories are a few of the past uses that can leave chemicals behind.

When you visit the property, look for old metal drums or barrels, old cars or vehicle parts, or a loading dock in the building. These are clues that chemicals may have been used there in the past.

Research the property history yourself or ask DPH to help find out about the property’s history.

Check city and town property records to see if the names of previous owners help identify past uses. You can search current and former corporation names at the Massachusetts Secretary of State website. This information may tell you the type of industry. Industries such as gas stations, auto repair shops, dry cleaners, and manufacturing facilities may have used harmful chemicals. Use state and federal databases to check for past chemical spills. EPA’s Cleanups in My Community website and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs Data Portal are two good resources. The resources mentioned in this short course are provided in the Safe Siting Resources sheet, available for download by clicking on the Resources link at the top right corner of the screen.

Was your building built before 1978? If so, it might have lead paint. Find out if the building has been inspected for lead paint. EEC requires group and school-aged programs to get a lead inspection by a licensed lead inspector. Lead hazards might also be present in family child care programs operating in houses built before 1978. DPH can help you learn how to get a lead inspection.

**Nearby Sites and Activities**

Certain activities can pollute the air, leave chemicals on the ground, or pollute groundwater. Contaminants from businesses can move onto neighboring properties. Not every business that uses chemicals will be a problem, but it is important to check.

Here’s what you can do:

Visit the neighborhood. Are there businesses that may use harmful chemicals nearby? Some businesses to look for are dry cleaners, print shops, gas stations, factories, and auto repair shops. Even some nail and hair salons can be a problem if they are located in the same building.

Look for nearby contaminated properties. Use state and federal databases to check for past chemical spills. EPA’s Cleanups in My Community website and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs Data Portal are good places to start.

Contact DPH for help with your search. DPH’s help is free. We can check maps and aerial photos for potential hazards like dumps, storage tanks, and former mill buildings. DPH can find out if there are any hazardous waste sites nearby. If there is a business nearby that uses hazardous chemicals, DPH can research whether people in your building could be exposed.

**Access to Safe Drinking Water**

Clean water is important, especially for infants who drink formula made with tap water. Children also drink more water for their body size than adults do.

It’s important to know if the water in your building comes from a private well or from a public water system. Ask the property owner if you don’t know.

What if your facility uses a private well?

EEC requires child care providers to show that the well has been inspected and approved by the local board of health or health department and meets drinking water standards set by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, or MassDEP.

Here is MassDEP’s recommended testing schedule for private wells.

Also, contact your local board of health to find out if it has any other testing requirements for private wells. You can arrange with a laboratory to collect and test your water samples, or you can collect your own samples and send them to a laboratory. MassDEP recommends using a state-certified laboratory.

What if your facility uses a public water source?

Public water suppliers are required to test for contaminants in drinking water. Check your water supplier's yearly water quality report. In addition, lead and copper can enter water from plumbing leading into or inside your building if it contains these metals. MassDEP advises child care facilities to test for lead and copper at their tap at least every 3 years. You can arrange with a laboratory to collect and test your water samples, or you can collect your own samples and send them to a laboratory. Again, MassDEP recommends using a state-certified laboratory. To find a state-certified laboratory, visit the MassDEP website listed on the Safe Siting Resources sheet, available for download at the Resources link at the top right corner of your screen.

**Naturally Occurring Contamination**

Sometimes hazardous chemicals come from natural sources. In Massachusetts, naturally occurring chemicals that can harm people’s health include radon gas in a building’s air and arsenic, uranium, and radon in water.

Radon gas is a common natural contaminant that can cause cancer. It seeps up from the ground when released by rock and soil. The only way to tell if there is radon in your building’s air is to have it tested.

Here’s what you can do:

Get your building tested for radon.

Contact DPH to learn how to test for and fix radon problems in buildings.

The Safe Siting Sheet provides a link for more information.

Arsenic, uranium, and radon can occur naturally in groundwater.

Here’s what you can do:

If you have a private well, test it. Follow testing guidance from MassDEP. Also, check with your community’s board of health or health department for local requirements.

If you are on public water, check your water supplier’s yearly water quality report.

**Child Care Programs and Environmental Justice**

Now we’d like to share some examples of how Choose Safe Places has helped child care programs with safe siting. In particular, we’ll describe some of our work in environmental justice communities.

Environmental justice is the principle that all people have the right to be protected from environmental pollution and to live in and enjoy a clean, healthy environment. Various forms of discrimination and racism have created long-standing health inequities for people of color and lower-income individuals. These populations have historically been excluded from meaningful participation in decisions that impact their communities’ environmental health. People of color and people with limited incomes are more likely to live near toxic waste sites, in areas with high air pollution, and in low-quality housing because of the inequitable distribution of high-pollution sites.

The Choose Safe Place program supports environmental justice by helping child care providers find locations that are safe for children, staff, and families.

**EJ in Massachusetts**

The Choose Safe Places program has studied environmental justice communities in southeastern Massachusetts. We found that these communities have a higher burden of contaminated sites compared to non-environmental justice communities. Environmental justice neighborhoods make up just 5% of the land area in the area we studied but are home to 30% of state- or federally-regulated contaminated sites. As shown on the map, 76% of these contaminated sites are densely concentrated in just 4 communities: Brockton, New Bedford, Fall River, and Taunton.

You can use DPH’s Massachusetts EJ tool to find out if you are located in an environmental justice community in Massachusetts. From the Environmental Public Health Tracking Environmental Justice page, click on the “MA DPH EJ Tool” button and find your city or town.

Whether or not you are in an environmental justice community, you can reach out to the Choose Safe Places program for help checking for environmental hazards when choosing a new location. This check can help you avoid locations with harmful chemicals from nearby businesses or past activities. This service is free of charge to child care providers.

**Program example #1**

Here is one example of how Choose Safe Places helped a child care program in an EJ community in Massachusetts. EEC contacted us after learning about contaminated soil at the child care facility. The program was in a neighborhood where industrial waste was dumped before homes were built. MassDEP tested surface soil at the child care facility as part of its investigation into the contamination. Some soil samples had high levels of arsenic, lead, PCBs, and other toxic chemicals.

We reviewed the soil sampling data and reassured EEC that there was no current risk of exposure and no health risks for children and staff based on the location of the contaminated soil. A thick layer of ground cover was present to prevent children and staff from contacting soil in the backyard, and signs were posted to prevent people from walking on the front yard where soil is contaminated below the surface.

We recommended that:

Children should not be allowed to dig through pea gravel and wood chips in the play yard.

People should obey posted signs to stay off the front yard.

The owner should properly maintain the pea gravel and wood chips.

The owner should make sure children wash their hands after being outside.

These recommendations were given to EEC and the child care provider, and we were available to answer questions from staff and parents.

**Program Example #2**

Here is another example. A provider in Barnstable looking to expand her home-based child care program into a larger center-based program filled out a property questionnaire. The Choose Safe Places program staff screened the property and identified two possible hazards: a print shop in the same building, and the Barnstable Municipal Airport, located about 600 feet north. We communicated this initial finding to the provider and EEC and said we would evaluate whether there could be a potential for exposure.

The DPH Indoor Air Quality Program helped us evaluate the print shop. Looking at the building layout along with satellite images and street views, we saw that risks to indoor air quality were unlikely. We also confirmed with the property owner that the print shop and proposed child care location would have separate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. Therefore, we concluded that chemicals from the print shop were unlikely to harm indoor air quality at the proposed location.

To evaluate the nearby airport, we reviewed site investigation reports to see if there were any risks from either past spills or ongoing cleanups. The reports described past releases of petroleum and other chemicals to soil and groundwater. But most of these releases had already been cleaned up, and those still being cleaned up were not located near the proposed child care location. We confirmed with the property owner that the building was served by municipal water. The source of this municipal water is far from the airport, and the latest water quality report showed that the water met state drinking water standards. We concluded that airport activities would not affect drinking water at the proposed location.

Because the provider’s first language was not English, we used a Portuguese interpreter to talk with the provider and share our findings. We also sent the final written summary of findings in both English and Portuguese.

**DPH Can Help**

Do you need help with choosing a safe location for your child care program? DPH can help you check for environmental hazards. Fill out a property questionnaire and we’ll look up information about your property, tell you what we find, and offer recommendations. DPH’s help is free.

**Contact Us**

For more information, resources, and assistance to help you choose a safe location for your child care facility, call us, email us, or visit us online.

Feel free to download the Safe Siting Resources Sheet with helpful information about the topics and resources in this course.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about Choose Safe Places for Early Care and Education.