

Ohio Choose Safe Places

Information for Child Care Center Operator Applicants and Re-Applicants



What is Ohio Choose Safe Places?

The Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) **Ohio Choose Safe Places (OCSP)** program is designed to help child care center operators make safer siting decisions that protect staff and children from harmful environmental hazards and chemical toxins through education and awareness.

To develop this program, ODH has worked closely with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA), and the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

Understanding the Problem

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), mercury, and pesticides. A new program might open in a contaminated industrial building that was never cleaned up, or next door to a dry cleaner using harmful chemicals.

This can put staff and especially children – who are more sensitive to the effects of chemicals because they're still developing and who tend to put objects which could be contaminated into their mouths – at **risk of health problems**. In some cases, these health effects may be irreversible.

How OCSP is Helping

OCSP encourages better choices about where to locate child care centers by educating potential first-time operator applicants, operators re-applying as part of a change of ownership, and operators amending a license as part of a change of location about common environmental hazards early in the process of establishing a child care center.

Operator applicants should consider the following **four key elements to safe siting** when deciding where to locate their child care center:

- ❖ **Past site use.**
- ❖ **Current neighbors.**
- ❖ **Natural contaminants.**
- ❖ **Drinking water.**

More information about each of these elements is presented on the following page.

Past Site Use

When deciding where to locate their child care center, potential operators should consider the past uses of their site and the land. Were harmful chemicals ever used, made, stored, or disposed of at the site you are considering? Some industries and businesses that have the potential to leave behind harmful wastes for years and even decades include:

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| ❖ Dry Cleaner | ❖ Funeral Home | ❖ Landfill |
| ❖ Hair/Nail Salon | ❖ Shooting Range | ❖ Agriculture |
| ❖ Automotive Body Shop | ❖ Metal Plating | ❖ Warehouse |
| ❖ Copy/Print Shop | ❖ Wood/Paper Treatment | ❖ Superfund sites |
| ❖ Gas Station | ❖ Recycling Facility | ❖ Brownfields sites |

To learn more about the site you are considering, check historical property records and speak with the landlord if you are planning to rent.

Current Neighbors

Businesses and industries in close proximity to your site which currently use chemicals have the potential to cause hazards if their chemicals are improperly handled, stored, or disposed of in a way that contaminates your property. While businesses that correctly handle their chemicals and chemical wastes will not cause any issues, it may be beneficial to site your facility away from the types of businesses in the list above.

Considering the list above, do you notice any nearby businesses that could potentially cause contamination at your site?

Natural Contaminants

In addition to man-made chemicals, it is important to be aware that naturally-occurring hazards may be present at your site. Do you know whether your site has been impacted by radon, a radioactive gas, or arsenic in the soil? Are there any nearby bodies of water which contain harmful algal blooms?

Drinking Water

It is important to know that your staff and children have a safe source of water for drinking and preparing food. This includes knowing that your pipes and fixtures are lead-free, and knowing that the water is free of contaminants like chemicals and microbial contaminants (like bacteria and parasites).

Do you know whether your site has access to a clean source of drinking water? Is the site served by a public water system or by a private well? Do you plan to bring in a bottled water service?

How Does OCSP Work?

Target Population

Ohio Choose Safe Places will focus on engaging potential **child care center** operator applicants. This includes **first-time applicants seeking initial licensure and operators seeking re-application as part of a change of location or a change of ownership.**

At this time, OCSP does not include home-based child care (Type A, Type B), preschools, day camps, or other types of child care in its focus. In the future, OCSP may be expanded to also include these groups.

Duration

The OCSP pilot program began in April 2019 and will continue through March 2020. Incorporating feedback and lessons learned, the OCSP program will continue indefinitely beginning April 2020.

Design

OCSP seeks to engage potential operator applicants and re-applicants in awareness and education as early in the process of establishing a business as possible. Prior to submitting any applications to ODJFS, potential operator applicants will be provided with educational materials, including this fact sheet, an environmental questionnaire, and a database of environmental hazard resources to assist in safe siting research. Throughout the application process, ODH will be available to answer any environmental health questions the applicant may have, or to direct their questions to the appropriate agency.

What Should I Do?

As a potential operator applicant or re-applicant, the best thing you can do is **be informed and aware**. Consider the four key elements to safe siting and be sure you have all the information you can get.

As part of the OCSP program, ODH offers the following resources to help you make the best safe siting decisions you can to protect the health of your children and staff:

- ❖ [Ohio Choose Safe Places Webpage](#). Visit the webpage for more information on OCSP and chemical contamination (www.odh.ohio.gov/HAS/OCSP)
- ❖ [Ohio Choose Safe Places Environmental Questionnaire](#). Take this quick survey to test your awareness of potential hazards at your site.
- ❖ [Ohio Environmental Resource Guide](#). Use this guide to easily find sources of information on environmental contamination and potential hazards in Ohio.
- ❖ [Environmental Hazards Contact Directory](#). Use this directory to help you reach out to the right agency to answer any questions you may have about contamination at your site.

Case Study

In 2003, the site of a former gas station in Pickaway County, Ohio was renovated to host a child care center. Unfortunately, just a few years prior, an incomplete excavation of underground storage tanks and petroleum-contaminated soil had left ongoing contamination just below the surface.

In 2006, by working closely with OEPA, ODH determined that occupants of the child care center were being exposed to many harmful chemicals associated with crude oil, including benzene. Benzene is known to cause leukemia (a type of blood cancer) and other blood disorders over time, and exposure to very high concentrations can cause dizziness, headache, nausea, anemia, and liver and kidney damage. Chemical vapors had been moving from contaminated soil below the daycare where petroleum had spilled, up through cracks and imperfections in the foundation, and into the indoor air where people were breathing it in. This is called vapor intrusion, and it is a common problem across Ohio.

Fortunately, the daycare was able to have a ventilation system installed which would vent the benzene and other toxic chemical vapors outside to be broken down by exposure to the elements, keeping staff and children safe from health effects. However, only time will tell whether the staff or children may have any long-term health effects from their exposure to the benzene.

By being better informed about what to look for when choosing a site through an awareness program like Ohio Choose Safe Places, the operator of the center might have been able to avoid the entire situation, and no one would have ever been exposed to dangerous chemical vapors.

For More Information

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