

Health Consultation No. 2

HEAD START PRESCHOOL

BRADENTON, MANATEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

AUGUST 12, 1999

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

Division of Health Assessment and Consultation

Atlanta, Georgia

Health Consultation: A Note of Explanation

An ATSDR health consultation is a verbal or written response from ATSDR to a specific request for information about health risks related to a specific site, a chemical release, or the presence of hazardous material. In order to prevent or mitigate exposures, a consultation may lead to specific actions, such as restricting use of or replacing water supplies; intensifying environmental sampling; restricting site access; or removing the contaminated material.

In addition, consultations may recommend additional public health actions, such as conducting health surveillance activities to evaluate exposure or trends in adverse health outcomes; conducting biological indicators of exposure studies to assess exposure; and providing health education for health care providers and community members. This concludes the health consultation process for this site, unless additional information is obtained by ATSDR which, in the Agency's opinion, indicates a need to revise or append the conclusions previously issued.

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HEALTH CONSULTATION NO. 2

HEAD START PRESCHOOL

BRADENTON, MANATEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Prepared by:

**Florida Department of Health
Bureau of Environmental Toxicology
Under a Cooperative Agreement with the
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry**

SUMMARY AND STATEMENT OF ISSUES

The Manatee County Health Department (MHD) in Bradenton asked the Florida Department of Health (DOH) to review the results of the arsenic hair and nail sampling results from biological sampling of the preschool children and staff at the Head Start Preschool in Bradenton, Florida. The MHD conducted the sampling on March 15 and 16, 1999. This health consultation evaluates the biological data to determine if a health threat exists and documents technical assistance provided to MHD by DOH to interpret the biological sampling results.

BACKGROUND

The site is located within Section 31, Township 34 South, Range 18 East in Manatee County, Florida (Figure 3). The site is located along the east side of 15th Street East, approximately 1500 feet south of 13th Avenue East. The area in the vicinity of the site includes citrus groves and single/multi-family residential developments and industrial properties. (Figure 1 & 2). The site is comprised of undeveloped, densely wooded land in the southern and eastern portions (approximately 8 acres), and the Manatee County Morton Clark Head Start facility. The topography surrounding the school and the site is relatively level. Drainage ditches border the north, east and south perimeters of the property.

Tropicana Products, Incorporated bought the Manatee County Morton Clark School site in 1968 which now houses the Head Start Preschool. Tropicana is a company that manufactures containers of juice. Land filling activities at the site occurred between 1968-1980. Later, the glass, metal, wood and fire bricks from their operations were land filled on the northern and eastern parts of the property. Some of these materials contained arsenic from Tropicana's glass making process. In 1980, a 3-4 foot layer of clean fill was placed on the landfill and the Head Start school was built. In September, 1998, the Manatee County School District initiated an environmental investigation of the Head Start property as a potential site for a new elementary school.

In May, 1999 the DOH prepared a health consultation documenting the technical assistance to the MHD from February and March, 1999. In this consultation, the DOH concluded that there was not a public health threat at the site based on environmental data.

In September and December 1998, soil sampling was done at the site by AT&E consultants, Tampa. The only contaminant found above screening levels was arsenic in the soil. Levels as high as 40 parts per million (ppm.) were reported. In February 1999, Tropicana hired a private toxicologist to interpret the environmental sampling results. The toxicologist concluded that the children and adults are within safe limits for potential exposures to arsenic. Tropicana Products, Incorporated met with Head Start staff, the School Board and Manatee County Health Department. Tropicana Products, Incorporated informed the Director of the school and the parents of the children that they would fund biological testing to determine if the children and staff were exposed to arsenic or other contaminants found in the soils above national average

background concentrations. On March 15 and 16, 1999, the MHD conducted hair testing of seven school staff and 23 school children. They also collected fingernail and toenails of eight school children. Most of the school staff chose not to participate in the testing. The samples were sent to National Medical Services in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania for analysis.

In April, 1999, the Director of the Head Start School staff received the hair sampling results from the laboratory. The maximum arsenic concentration in the staff and children's hair was 1.18 micrograms per gram, or $\mu\text{g/g}$ (laboratory's normal range = 0.03 - 3.0 $\mu\text{g/g}$). All of the arsenic concentrations for each school child and staff member are within normal range. Therefore, we do not think the arsenic at the site poses a public health threat.

There were not enough fingernails and toenails for the laboratory to analyze for arsenic. Since the children are only 3 to 5 years old, we did not expect to collect a lot of nail samples. The laboratory needs at least 0.5 grams of nail per child or adult. Also, in April, 1999, the MHD requested the DOH to review the hair sampling results of the school children and interpret these results.

DISCUSSION

Evaluation of biological data:

Arsenic tends to accumulate in hair and nails and measurements of arsenic levels in these tissues may be a useful indication of past exposures. Normal levels in hair and nails are 1 microgram per gram ($\mu\text{g/g}$) or 1 part per million (ppm) or less(2). These values may increase from several fold to over 100 fold following arsenic exposure and remain elevated for 6-12 months. Minimum exposure levels that produce measurable increases in arsenic levels in hair and nails have not been previously defined(2).

Analysis of hair may yield misleading results due to the presence of arsenic absorbed to the external surface, but this can be minimized by collecting samples from close to the scalp or from unexposed areas of the body and by washing the hair before analysis. Similarly, extensive washing of nails is required to remove external contamination(2). The school children and staff washed their hair before hair samples were taken by the beautician who assisted the MHD. They were also told in advance to remove any hair products from their hair that may contain arsenic. The hair samples were taken as close to the scalp as possible.

The maximum arsenic concentration in the staff and children's hair was 1.18 $\mu\text{g/g}$ (laboratory's normal range = 0.03 - 3.0 $\mu\text{g/g}$). All of the arsenic concentrations for each school child and staff member are within normal range as defined by the testing laboratory, and consistent with the background levels for arsenic in hair reported in the ATSDR toxicologic profile. Therefore, we do not think the arsenic at the site poses a public health threat.

Technical Support Provided by DOH:

The DOH provided the technical assistance to the MHD. We gave the MHD examples of questionnaires that were used for past exposure investigations (Attachment 2). We also gave them information on laboratories that analyze arsenic hair and nail samples. During the months of February-April, 1999 we answered any questions the MHD had regarding exposure investigations and arsenic testing of children and staff at the school. On March 15 and 16, we visited the school while the MHD conducted the biological sampling. We were available to answer any questions the MHD or the parents might have.

Children's Health Section:

The arsenic levels found in the school children's hair were below the normal level of 1.0 $\mu\text{g/g}$ in hair as referenced in the Toxicological Profile for Arsenic. Therefore, we do not think the arsenic levels pose a public health threat to the children at the Bradenton Head Start School.

Children's Health Conclusion:

Each child at the school attends the school for a total of three years maximum. Based upon the arsenic hair testing data, the levels of arsenic in all of the children's hair samples are below all within the normal arsenic concentrations of 1.0 $\mu\text{g/g}$ for hair. This suggests that no significant exposures to arsenic are occurring, therefore no health effects are expected for the children attending this school.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the arsenic concentrations detected in the hair of school children and staff at the Bradenton Head Start School, there is not a public health threat for arsenic.

RECOMMENDATION

The DOH will continue to provide technical assistance to the MHD upon request.

REFERENCES

1. Summary Report and Data Evaluation: Manatee County, Morton Clark School Site, Bradenton Florida. February 25, 1999. Christopher Teaf, Toxicologist for Tropicana.
2. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). February 22, 1999. Updated Draft Toxicological Profile for Arsenic. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, page 158.

ATTACHMENTS

Figure 1: Site Location Map

Figure 2. City Map

Figure 3. County Map

Attachment 1: Questionnaire Given to Parents

PREPARER OF REPORT

Susan Ann Bland
Florida Department of Health
Bureau of Environmental Toxicology

ATSDR Regional Representative

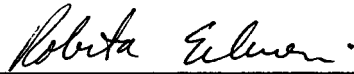
Bob Safay
ATSDR/ORO

ATSDR Technical Project Officer

Roberta Erlwein
Division of Health Assessment and Consultation
Superfund Site Assessment Branch

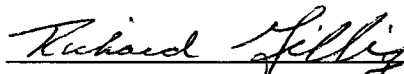
CERTIFICATION

The Bradenton Head Start Health Consultation was prepared by the Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Environmental Toxicology, under a cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. It is in accordance with approved methodology and procedures existing at the time the health consultation was begun.



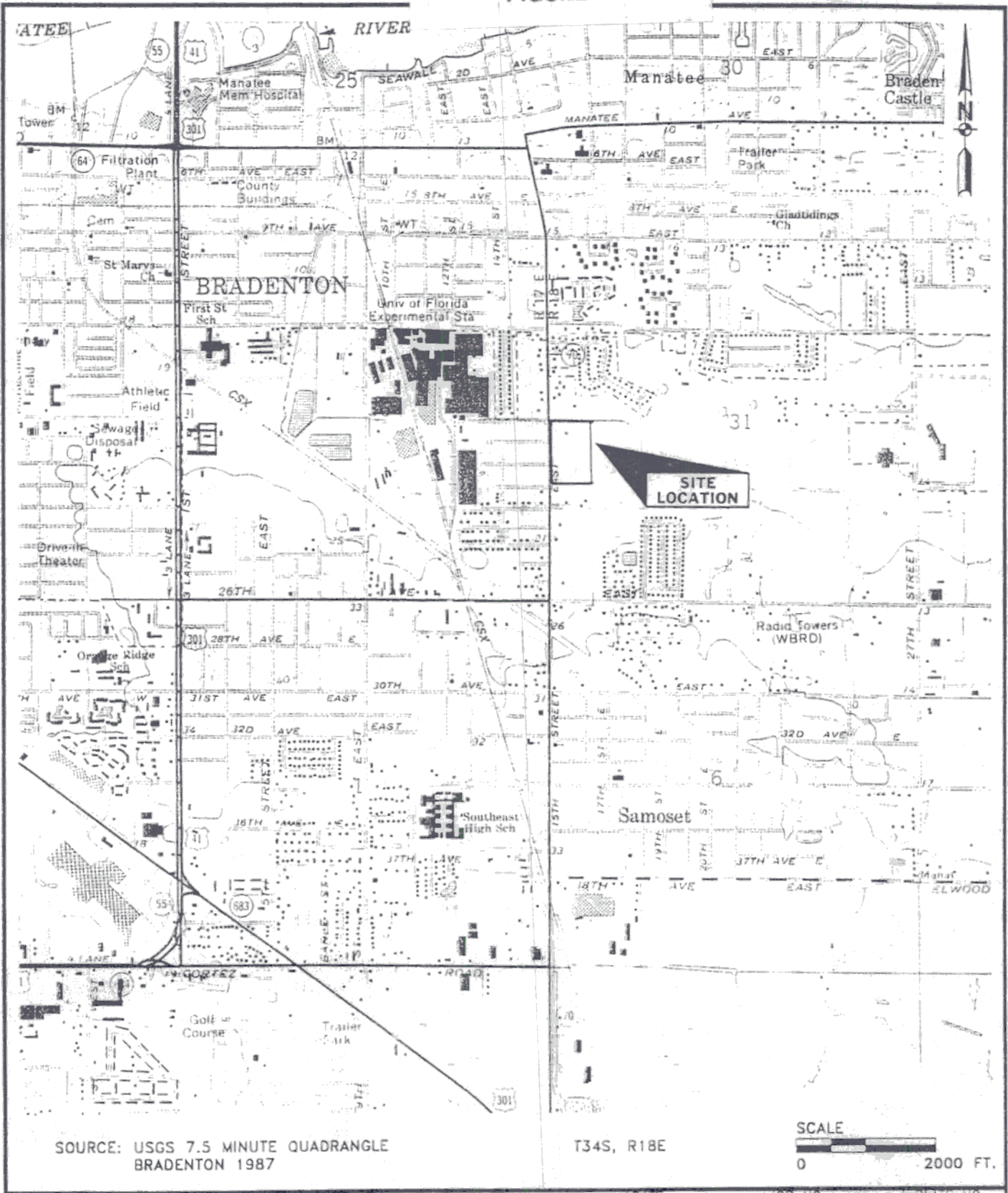
Technical Project Officer, S.P.S., SSAB, DHAC

The Division of Health Assessment and Consultation, ATSDR, has reviewed this health consultation, and concurs with its findings.



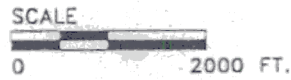
Section Chief, SPS, SSAB, DHAC, ATSDR

FIGURE 1



SOURCE: USGS 7.5 MINUTE QUADRANGLE
BRADENTON 1987

T34S, R18E



DYE, DEITRICH, PRATHER, PETRUFF & ST. PAUL, P.L.	DATE 01/14/99	JOB NO. 27-2957A	PLATE NO. 1
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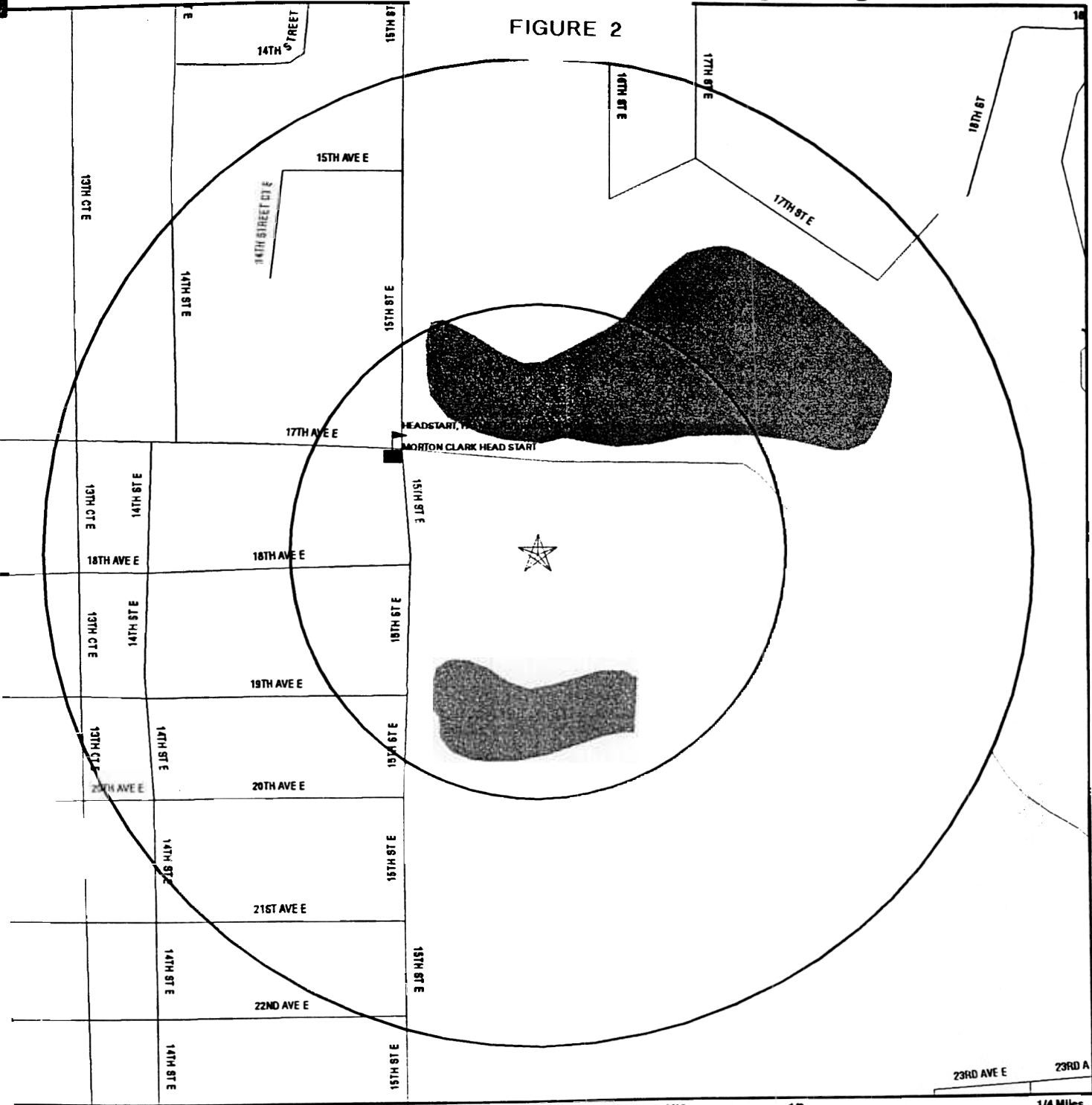
atlanta testing & engineering
1211 TECH BLVD., SUITE 200 TAMPA, FLORIDA 33619
Florida • Georgia • Carolinas

SITE LOCATION MAP

1707 15TH STREET EAST
BRADENTON, FLORIDA

DETAIL MAP - 295427.1s - Atlanta Testing & Engineering

FIGURE 2



Target Property

Sites at elevations higher than or equal to the target property






Sites at elevations lower than the target property

Coal Gasification Sites (if requested)

Sensitive Receptors

National Priority List Sites

Landfill Sites

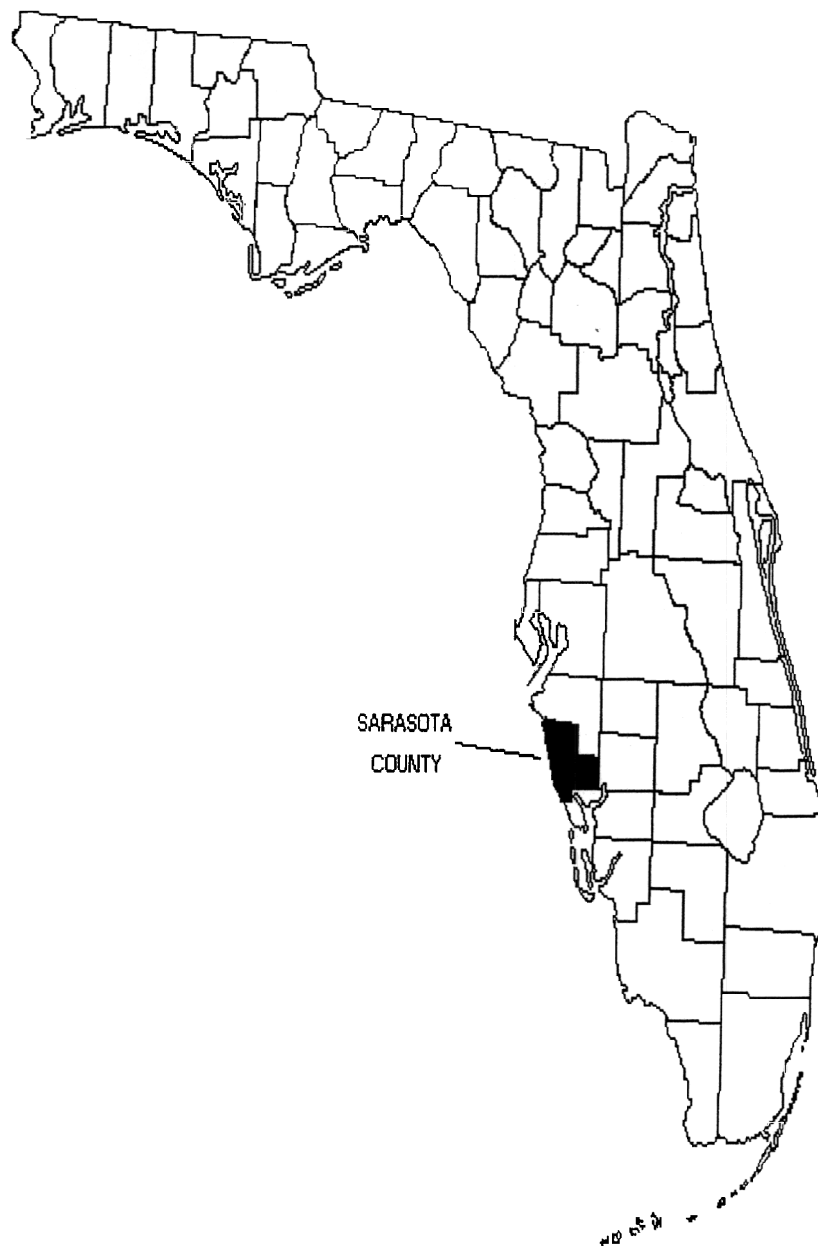
-  Power transmission lines
-  Oil & Gas pipelines
-  100-year flood zone
-  500-year flood zone
-  Wetlands per National Wetlands Inventory (1994)

TARGET PROPERTY: Manatee County School Board
ADDRESS: 1707 15th Street, East
CITY/STATE/ZIP: Bradenton FL 34208
LAT/LONG: 27.4830 / 82.5456

CUSTOMER: Atlanta Testing & Engineering
CONTACT: Cindy Cobb
INQUIRY #: 295427.1s
DATE: September 22, 1998 1:34 pm

FIGURE 3

Map of Florida



SOURCE: FLORIDA DOH FILES

ATTACHMENT 2

Household Record Form

ARSENIC TESTING HOUSEHOLD RECORD

Address _____

Phone _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Collect a hair sample from each person to be tested. After the samples are collected, answer the questions below by filling in the requested information or by circling the appropriate response.

First Name, Last Name/Age	Occupation, if any.	Did this person eat seafood during the last three days? If yes, indicate the type and amount of seafood eaten.	Did this person work or play outside in the playground during the last three days? If yes, indicate the type and duration of outdoor activity.
_____ / _____	_____	YES/NO	YES/NO
_____ / _____	_____	YES/NO	YES/NO
_____ / _____	_____	YES/NO	YES/NO
_____ / _____	_____	YES/NO _____	YES/NO _____
_____ / _____	_____	YES/NO	YES/NO

If you would like us to send the results to your physician, please write the physician's name and telephone number below:

Additional comments:

Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT For Interview, Fingernail and Toenail Testing

The Florida Department of Health, with assistance from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, is offering free tests to children and staff of the Manatee County Morton Clark School site in Bradenton, FL to determine possible recent exposure to arsenic.

The test has two parts: a brief record form and a fingernail and toenail test for arsenic. My participation will involve:

Answering two questions about the recent activities of the person being tested.

2. Allowing fingernail and toenail testing (described below) on:

Myself (Only if employed at Head Start Center)

My child/ward name _____

My child/ward name _____

My child/ward name _____

My child/ward name _____

a. A fingernail and toenail sample will be collected by the Manatee County Health Department staff at the preschool.

Participant: I understand that there will be no physical examination. I understand that I can stop my or my child's/ward's participation at any time. If I choose not to participate or to stop at any time, there will be no penalty. Any benefits that I now receive or to which I am entitled will not be affected by this decision.

Results: As a result of my/my child/ward's participation; in this test, I/my child/ward will receive a fingernail and toenail test for arsenic free of charge. The Florida Department of Health will send me a letter within six to eight weeks with my/my child/ward's test results.

Confidentiality: I understand that the Florida Department of Health will take every reasonable precaution to keep my records confidential. Any information shared with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry will be kept in accordance with the Federal Privacy Act of 1974. Any reports of the test results will not identify specific individuals or households, and will only give group information.

BRADENTON HEAD START

Participant Consent: I have read the description of this testing program. All of my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I voluntarily request that I (my child/ward, named above) be tested. I understand that I may be contacted by the Florida Department of Health to discuss my test results.

Participant/guardian name (print) _____

Participant/guardian signature _____

Date _____ Witness _____

Should you have any questions, please call the Manatee County Health Department at (941) 748-0747, extension 1235 or 1266.

Household Record Form

ARSENIC TESTING HOUSEHOLD RECORD

Parent Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Fingernail and toenail sample will be collected from each person to be tested. Please answer each question below by filling in the requested information or by circling the appropriate response.

First Name, Last Name/Age	Occupation, if any	Did this person eat seafood during the last three days? If yes, indicate the type and amount of seafood eaten.	Did this person work or play outside in the playground in the last three days? If yes, indicate the type and duration of outdoor activity.
_____ _____/____	_____	YES/NO _____	YES/NO _____
_____ _____/____	_____	YES/NO _____	YES/NO _____
_____ _____/____	_____	YES/NO _____	YES/NO _____
_____ _____/____	_____	YES/NO _____	YES/NO _____
_____ _____/____	_____	YES/NO _____	YES/NO _____

If you would like us to send the results to your physician, please write the physician's name and telephone number below:

Additional comments:

Consent Form

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT
For Interview, Hair Sample Testing**

The Florida Department of Health, with assistance from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, is offering free tests to children and staff of the Manatee County Morton Clark School site in Bradenton, FL to determine possible recent exposure to arsenic.

The test has two parts: a brief record form and a hair sample test for arsenic. My participation will involve:

- 1 Answering two questions about the recent activities of the person being tested.

2. Allowing hair sample testing (described below) on:
 - () Myself (Only if employed at Head Start Center)
 - () My child/ward name _____
 - () My child/ward name _____
 - () My child/ward name _____
 - () My child/ward name _____

- a. A hair sample will be collected by the Manatee County Health Department staff at the preschool.

Participant: I understand that there will be no physical examination. I understand that I can stop my or my child's/ward's participation at any time. If I choose not to participate or to stop at any time, there will be no penalty. Any benefits that I now receive or to which I am entitled will not be affected by this decision.

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Participant/guardian name (print) _____

Participant/guardian signature _____

Date _____ Witness _____

Should you have any questions, please call the Manatee County Health Department at (941) 748-0747, extension 1235 or 1266.

ATTACHMENT 1

Author: One of the Grimms [SMTP:cubfan@bigfoot.com] at EXCHDOH
Date: 2/25/99 12:00 PM
Priority: Normal
TO: Susan Bland at HQSHSER
TO: Roger Inman
Subject: Tropicana/Preschool Arsenic Tests

----- Message Contents -----

Thursday, February 25, 1999

Tropicana to complete report soon

BY KEVIN HORAN
Bradenton Herald Staff Writer

EAST BRADENTON -- It may be days or even weeks before Head Start preschoolers get tested for arsenic exposure, as officials wait to learn how much of the chemical is on school grounds.

School and health administrators say they are waiting on Tropicana Products Inc., which disposed of arsenic-tainted glass at the 1705 15th St. E. site in the late 1970s, to complete that report later this week.

``Once that is received, at that point the decision will be made as to what type of testing we need to do,''' said Dr. James Ogedegbe, an epidemiologist with Manatee County's health department.

Timing on the report is critical because state and local health officials will use its findings to determine how they will test students for exposure to arsenic, which affects the body's kidneys, liver and blood. The report also should show what health threat the material poses to the preschool's 115 students, ages 3-5.

Tropicana gave the 10-acre site to the Manatee County School Board in 1979 in exchange for a 6-acre parcel owned by the school board.

Tropicana officials, who announced Feb. 18 they had found arsenic in soil and groundwater samples at the Head Start site, had hoped to have a report ready by Wednesday. As the day wore on, though, that goal fell through.

``We do expect the report to come in yet this week. Other than that, I don't have much more specific information,''' Kristine Nickel, Tropicana's communications manager, said late Wednesday.

While Tropicana works on preparing the report, preschooler parents seem to be keeping their cool, according to Head Start Director Gwen Brown. She said she doesn't know of any who have pulled their youngsters from classes; most are patiently waiting for the student testing to begin.

``There doesn't seem to be any alarm, yet,''' she said. ``For the most part folks seem to realize they have to wait on the final report and review to determine how we're going to test.'''

When that report and review do come in, Tropicana officials said they believe it will show the arsenic used by the company in glassmaking operations during the 1970s and then disposed of into the landfill will

pose little or no risk

Most arsenic levels in soil and groundwater from the site fall within federal and state guidelines, and students spend little time at the school, they said. And company workers have been fencing off "hot spots" -- areas where arsenic levels did exceed guidelines.

Plus, they said, the company is paying to test the students to see how much, if any, arsenic has built up in their systems.

That will get started once the report comes in. Then, state and local health officials will review arsenic levels at the preschool and decide the best testing approach to take. The testing could come via the state health department, the county health department or even an independent lab.

At this point, it's not sure," Ogedegbe said.

Kevin Horan, environmental and islands reporter, can be reached at 745-7080, ext. 2620, or at khoran@bradenton.com

Saturday, February 27, 1999

No arsenic threat at Head Start

BY KEVIN HORAN

Herald Staff Writer

BRADENTON -- Arsenic found at an east Bradenton preschool should pose no threat to students and staff there despite the substance's deadly potential, according to a report released Friday by Tropicana Products Inc.

The limited amount of arsenic found in soil and groundwater at the Head Start school, plus the short time people are around it, should work to limit health risks, company leaders said.

State and local officials, though, remain cautious about giving an all-clear to the 10-acre site at 1707 15th St. E., used 20 years ago by Tropicana as a landfill.

"It's too early to tell," said Beth Knauss, environmental manager for Florida Department of Environmental Protection's hazardous waste section in Tampa. "We probably will be asking for more information."

For now, that's the position of all the state and local agencies involved. One after another, health, environmental and school officials said Friday they would wait until they can review Tropicana's inch-thick report before they ask for more information, test the school's 115 students or close the case.

Tropicana contended in its report that the site was safe, just as company executives have done since they announced Feb. 18 they had found arsenic at the federally funded preschool for children age 3-5.

"Given what we know about the use of the site, it is safe," said Christopher Teaf, a former employee for the DEP and now a Tallahassee consultant hired by Tropicana to complete the report.

State administrators say they need more data before they agree with Tropicana's report.

The DEP likely will ask Tropicana officials what kind of materials they found during initial digging at the site, Knauss said. Agency leaders also could ask the company to re-test some wells and determine which way groundwater flows in the area.

If the contaminant entered the groundwater table, Knauss said, it could migrate off-site and threaten nearby well users.

Head Start taps into the municipal water supplies for drinking water.

And the DEP won't take on face value the company's assertion that students and staffers are safe, Knauss added. Instead, the agency will review the number-crunching behind Tropicana's conclusions.

"I definitely want our toxicologist to review the assumptions that Dr. Teaf used in his evaluations," she said.

State health department reviewers said they, too, will check the report closely. They want to see what levels of arsenic have been detected and where. That will show the best method, if any, to test students for arsenic exposure said Susan Bland, exposure investigation coordinator for Florida's health department.

The company had used arsenic – which affects the body's kidneys, liver and blood – in glass-making operations during the late 1970s, then disposed of excess arsenic-containing glass into the landfill.

The Manatee County School District acquired the property in 1979, apparently unaware of its history, after swapping tracts of land with Tropicana.

Company officials don't dispute that the site has arsenic. In the report, though, they make no mention of whether the arsenic comes from their prior operations, from fill dirt used by the school district to level the site for Head Start construction or from natural sources.

The presence of arsenic alone, though, doesn't mean there is a health threat, they add. Average arsenic levels at the site are no higher than found anywhere in Florida. And for those few "hot spots" that do have high levels, crews already have fenced them off to keep children out.

Moreover, they said, students and workers spend relatively little time on the site, so they likely won't face much exposure to arsenic.

The state will coordinate voluntary student testing efforts, with the county's health department collecting samples, Bland said.

Based on early data, it appears the best method would be to test hair samples, rather than blood or urine, she added.

Head Start Director and Manatee County Commissioner Gwen Brown was traveling out of town on commission business Friday and couldn't be reached for comment. Head Start administrators routed all questions through Brown's office.

School district leaders say they will leave the matter of student testing up to Head Start, the health departments and Tropicana.

For their part, Tropicana officials said they remain eager to ease anxious

feelings any preschooler parents may be having, and will pay for any student testing.

"We stand behind our initial offer," said Kristine Nickel, Tropicana's communications manager. "Our foremost concern is that the parents feel comfortable with the findings and that they feel their children are safe."

But no one knows for sure when that safe feeling will come.

"We'll get the report Monday morning and look at it," Bland said. "I'm just not sure how long it will take to look."

Kevin Horan, environmental and islands reporter, can be reached at 745-7080, ext. 2620, or at khoran@bradenton.com

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BRADENTON

School attendees checked for arsenic

By Dale White
STAFF WRITER



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE DIEMER

Derrick Louis, 3, waits with his mom, Teresa Louis, for health department workers to take a toenail sample for arsenic testing Monday at Head Start in Bradenton.

filled out consent forms.

Head Start Director Gw Brown, who declined to be tested herself, said she expected more people to request testing. She noted that health authorities will be back at the preschool today.

Brown intends to form a task force of parents to help decide whether Head Start should stay or relocate. For now, she is waiting for word from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. "The DEP has yet to decide how the areas with the highest concentrations of arsenic should be dealt with," Brown said.

Contact Dale White at 742-6161
by e-mail at DaleAWhite@juno.com

Children and employees at the Head Start preschool in east Bradenton began submitting hair and nail samples Monday to state health authorities who want to check them for arsenic exposure.

Test results from the samples, which will be sent to a lab under contract with the state, may not be ready for several weeks.

"There's minimal risk of any exposure" to arsenic detected in soil at the preschool, said Roger Inman, a toxicologist with the Florida Department of Health. "We're just doing this (testing) to make Dr. (Gladys) Branic (of the county Health Department), the parents and myself feel better."

Last month, the School Board, which owns the Head Start site at 707 15th St. E., and Tropicana Products, which once owned the property, announced that varying levels of arsenic had been detected in the soil.

Children who attend the Head Start might have been exposed to the poison if they frequently swallowed arsenic-tainted dirt, Inman said. Yet Inman shared Branic's opinion that, because arsenic levels are low in the playgrounds where the soil is covered with sod and mulch, the children's exposure risk seems slight.

Evelyn Jennings took her 4-year-old daughter Danielle in for testing Monday. "She hasn't had any sickness, but I wanted her tested to be sure."

Jennings, a teacher's aide at Head Start, gave a hair sample, too. "It's a precaution."

Other parents shared that sentiment. "It's for my own peace of mind," said Tricia McColl, who brought her 4-year-old daughter Nicole tested.

Because her 3-year-old son Derrick occasionally has rashes that she cannot explain, Teresa Louis wanted him checked. But his hair and nails all were too short for an adequate clipping for testing. "I'll have to let his hair grow out and see if we can try again," Louis said.

Tropicana, a citrus juice manufacturer, used the property where Head Start now sits as a dump site before donating it to the School Board in a property swap in 1979. The arsenic is believed to have come from furnace residue and other waste from the plant that makes Tropicana's glass bottles. Arsenic commonly was used in glass manufacturing until the late 1970s.

As preparation for the testing, parents were advised not to wash their children's hair or apply cosmetics to their nails for one day prior to the sampling. Arsenic can be found in some beauty products.

Licensed beauticians followed a written protocol to take the hair or nail samples, using a fresh comb with each person and carefully sealing each sample in a separate plastic container. Nail samples were taken

if hair samples were not at least two inches long.

Hair and nails show traces of long-term exposure to arsenic, Inman said. Blood or urine tests would not be as reliable. "It's fairly common to get arsenic in the urine from eating seafood," he said.

If any test comes back positive, health authorities will have to rule out any possibility that the arsenic may be coming from another source, such as diet, before concluding that Head Start's soil is the source of the contamination, Branic said.

Exposure to sawdust from chemically treated wood, or to smoke from that wood when it is burned, can be another cause of arsenic poisoning, Inman said.

Tropicana Products has agreed to pay for the tests. Health authorities are unsure what Tropicana's bill might total. "It will depend on the number of samples," Branic said.

Of the 115 children and 20 employees at Head Start, just 20 or so submitted to testing after health authorities spent nearly an hour at the preschool Monday. Children had to be accompanied by parents, who

LOCAL

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 1999

Arsenic testing begins



Steven Nesius /Special to the Herald
Four year-old Calvin Williams has his fingernails clipped by professional hair stylist Cherial Albritton to be tested for arsenic content.

State scientists say tiny slivers of 4-year-old Calvin Williams' toenails collected Monday will tell them whether he was exposed to arsenic while playing outside his east Bradenton preschool.

Calvin was one of 31 children at the Manatee County Head Start, 1707 15th St. E., who had samples of their hair and nails collected for testing to see how much, if any, arsenic is in their bodies. The school sits on top of a site that Tropicana Products Inc. once used to discard manufacturing debris that contained arsenic and other chemicals.

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Arsenic testing begins

BY DESIREE GARCIA

Herald Staff Writer

MANATEE

State scientists say tiny slivers of 4-year-old Calvin Williams' toenails collected Monday will tell them whether he was exposed to arsenic while playing outside his east Bradenton preschool.

Calvin was one of 31 children at the Manatee County Head Start, 1707 15th St. E., who had samples of their hair and nails collected for testing to see how much, if any, arsenic is in their bodies. The school sits on top of a site that Tropicana Products Inc. once used to discard manufacturing debris that contained arsenic and other chemicals.

There are 115 students enrolled in the federally funded school, said Gwen Brown, Manatee County Head Start director and Manatee County commissioner.

The samples were taken by the Manatee County Health Department and will be analyzed by a private laboratory in Pennsylvania. Results are expected in several weeks.

Although enough samples were taken for the county to make a decision about the entire school population, more samples will be taken today from 8 a.m. until noon, said Dr. Gladys Branic, director of the Manatee County Health Department. The process is a voluntary choice made by parents, she said.

Besides Manatee county doctors, the state's leading toxicologist, Roger Inman, was on hand to answer questions and assure parents that any health risks are minimal.

"We're talking here about concentrations that are not at levels that would be expected to make people ill, even if you ate a little of the dirt," Inman said. "The reason we're taking hair samples is to satisfy in our own minds that they are not exposed."

Tropicana spokeswoman Kristine Nickel said the company has acted as quickly as possible in informing parents and others about what they found at the school. The company is taking whatever steps are necessary, she said, to make sure no children are at risk and that parents can be assured of it, including paying for Monday's tests.

Some parents say they will continue to be worried until they see test results that say their children are free of arsenic.

"I was surprised," said Calvin's mother, Reiko Williams, about first learning that the arsenic was found at her son's school. "I'm just waiting for the results. I really don't understand everything."

Depending on the results of the tests, she said her family, which lives near the school on 21st Street East, may move out of the neighborhood. The discovery of the arsenic punctuates an underlying concern she has about living so close to a manufacturing plant, she said.

Tammy Edwards said she is angry that her 3-year-old son Fredrick may have been exposed to arsenic.

"I'm having him tested to make sure my baby's all right," Edwards said. "Why, after all this time that Tropicana knew, are we just finding out? Them being a big corporation, all kinds of tests should have been done," she said of the school's construction on the 10-acre site about 20 years ago.

"If the kids have been exposed, Tropicana should be fined," said Yolanda Hall, who waited with her daughter, Aerial Jones, 3, in front of the big white Manatee County bus painted with balloons and cartoon figures parked in front of the school.

Nickel emphasized that Tropicana is very concerned about the safety of the children.

"There were not any unusual delays in getting the information to the parents," Nickel said. "We did not sit on information."

As soon as the company got a toxicologist's report in February, it arranged for a meeting between the county, the school board and Head Start and informed the parents the afternoon of that meeting, she said. The next day, an informational meeting was held for parents.

While the news of the arsenic made Theresa Mobley nervous about her 4-year-old daughter's well-being, she said she feels satisfied with the action taken so far.

"I think the school and Tropicana has been very up-front and honest in informing the parents," Mobley said. "They're doing all they can do. I just hope no child has been exposed to anything that could be harmful to them."

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