SC DEPARTMENT of ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Fact Sheet

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Black Creek Elementary School

In March 2026, the S.C. Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) learned that Black Creek Elementary School was recently built on land that was formerly used as a field for land-applying biosolids from the Galey & Lord facility (G&L), which may have contained per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). SCDES collected extensive soil samples from the school property to test for PFAS as well as metals, PCBs and pesticides. SCDES and the USEPA performed risk assessments to evaluate the sample results.

Key takeaways

- No metals, PCBs or pesticides were detected at levels of concern.
- Three (3) PFAS met USEPA guidelines for further evaluation, but the risk assessments concluded that concentrations were below levels requiring immediate action.
- The PFAS compounds did **not** present a risk to staff or students during the school year.
- SCDES is in communication with the school about options for covering exposed soil in play areas—such as adding grass, mulch, or other suitable materials. While not required, covering soil would help further reduce any potential exposure.
- Where people come in contact with PFAS in soil, the exposure risk can be even further reduced by washing hands prior to eating or drinking and cleaning shoes to remove dirt after spending time outside.
- PFAS is used in many products, so care should be taken not to substitute one product for another without knowing the PFAS content. As an example, artificial turf can contain higher concentrations of PFAS than were found in the soil.

What are per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)?

PFAS are a group of thousands of human-made chemicals that were and are used widely in various industries since the 1930s. PFAS became broadly used worldwide because of their useful physical and chemical properties that include resistance to stains, heat, oil, grease, and water. PFAS are sometimes called “forever chemicals” because they don’t easily break down in the environment.

Today, PFAS are widespread in the environment and can be found in water, food, animals, soil, air, wastewater, and in many consumer products.

Background

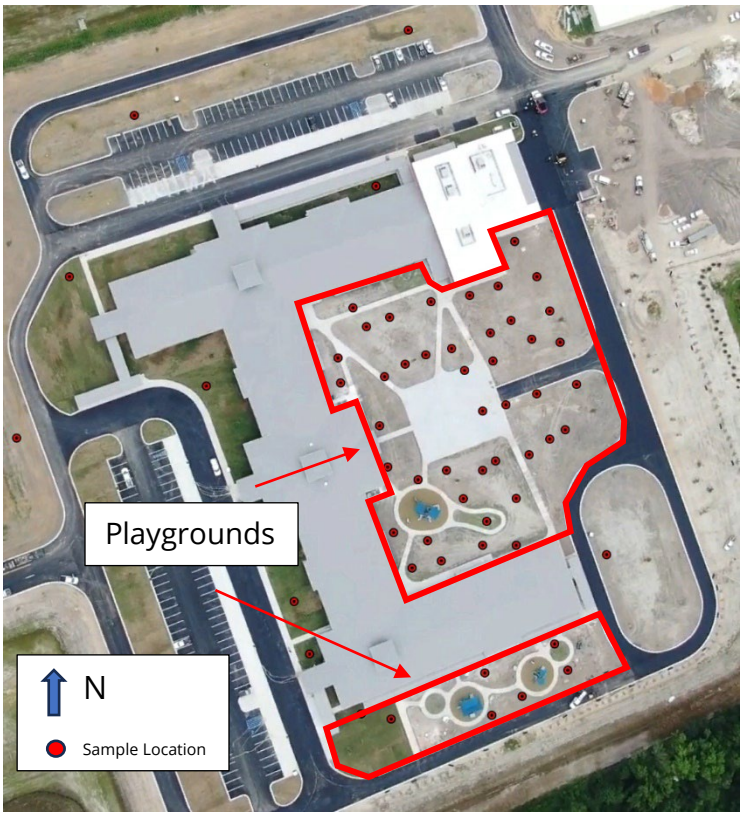
Black Creek Elementary School is located at 2225 Leavensworth Road in Darlington. Construction of the school began in 2024, and the school first opened for the 2025-2026 school year.

The school was built on land that was historically used as an agricultural field, and it was one of several fields in and around Darlington County that received wastewater treatment sludge as fertilizer from the former G&L

facility in Society Hill. G&L was a textile plant that closed in 2016 and is currently being investigated by the USEPA because the plant site contains contamination after years of industrial operations.

Site evaluation

In March 2026, SCDES and USEPA learned that Black Creek Elementary School was built on a former agricultural field that had received sludge from G&L. Both agencies quickly began an investigation to determine whether there was any immediate risk that students, teachers or faculty could be exposed to PFAS in outdoor areas where sludge was applied to the soil decades ago.



In April 2026, SCDES collected 68 soil samples from the school property. Soil samples were analyzed for metals, PCBs, pesticides, and PFAS. The majority of samples were collected from the playground areas where students and staff spend most of their outdoor time and may be exposed to soil (see image).

Results

Metals, PCBs, and pesticides were not detected at levels of concern. At two of the playground sampling sites, three (3) PFAS compounds — Perfluorodecanoic Acid (PFDA), Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA), and Perfluorooctanoic Sulfonate (PFOS) — were identified at levels that met the USEPA's guidelines for further evaluation. Therefore, USEPA and SCDES conducted detailed risk assessments, which concluded that these compounds were not present at levels that warranted immediate action, and they did not present an exposure concern during the school year.

How can I further reduce potential exposure?

Related to Black Creek Elementary, potential PFAS exposure can be reduced by washing hands and cleaning shoes to remove dirt after spending time outside.

SCDES and USEPA will continue to work closely with the school to provide information, options and recommendations for addressing the soil and reducing potential health impacts from long-term exposure.

It's not reasonably possible to eliminate PFAS exposure altogether because these chemicals are present in food, water, and many different consumer products — such as carpet, upholstery, clothing, toiletries, cosmetics, food packaging and more — as well as throughout the environment. However, consumer PFAS exposure can be reduced by limiting the use of products that contain PFAS. Learn more at des.sc.gov/PFAS and epa.gov/pfas.