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High Levels of Lead Found at First Coast School

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JACKSONVILLE, FL -- High levels of lead have been found on the Darnell-Cookman Middle School campus while the school prepares to build a classroom addition.

In a letter to parents, school officials said, "tests to date have not shown any significant health threat."

The lead is being connected to ash from an incinerator used by the city decades ago to burn waste.

Incinerator ash normally has lead and other metals. Health officials say lead exposure can pose problems for young children.

City crews spent Wednesday sampling the soil to determine the footprint of contaminated soil.

The Mayor's Office says the city knew of the presence of ash at the school.

Spokeswoman Susie Wiles told First Coast News ash has been found in recent years in other parts of the city.

Wiles says the city will put "ground cover on the parking lot area" as a temporary fix.

The city has set aside more than \$80 million to handle the lead problem, but according to Wiles, the city is waiting for the green light from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Jill Johnson, the spokesperson for Duval County Schools, says contaminated soil will have to be dealt with before the district goes forward with a \$20 million expansion at Darnell-Cookman.

When questioned about the threat to students, Johnson says, "the City of Jacksonville and their officials have pretty much assured us that there's no exposure risk to students."

Parents will have a chance to ask questions at an open house at Darnell-Cookman next week.

School, city and health department officials will be available to offer answers at the meeting.

It's set for February 28. It will begin when school ends at 3:15 p.m. and lasts until 7 p.m.

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