



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: EARLY CARE SITING FOR HEALTH, EQUITY AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

Why is Early Care Important to Our Communities?

- Economy: Early care allows parents to stay in the workforce and fuel the economy.
- Health: Children are especially vulnerable to hazardous contaminants because they are still growing and developing. Safe early care is essential for children's health and development.
- Equity: Impoverished communities are often adjacent to hazardous activities and have fewer child care options, creating child care deserts. Access to quality, safe early care should be available in all communities.

Why Should Planners Care?

Providing affordable, accessible, high-quality child care to every family is a foundational mission of the American Planning Association and planners, public health workers and local governments across the nation.

What is the NC Choose Safe Places (CSP) Program?

- CSP's goal is to make sure children and staff aren't exposed to dangerous chemicals in the child care environment.
- Even if child care programs meet current state licensing regulations, the child care facility may still be in a location where children and staff can be exposed to environmental contamination.
- Identifying and addressing potential environmental site hazards, especially before a child care program is licensed, can prevent and reduce harmful exposures to children and staff.

How Can an Early Care Site Become Contaminated?

- Former uses of the site (for example, a former dry cleaner)
- Migration of harmful substances from nearby properties
- Presence of naturally occurring harmful substances, such as radon in the soil
- Contaminants in drinking water, including lead and arsenic



Choosing an Early Care Site

- Using data to inform the site selection process can positively impact early care programs
- Maps and other spatial data tools can be leveraged to identify areas of highest need or greatest suitability for early care facilities (see Resources below)
- Establish threshold criteria – set minimum separation buffers around hazardous activities and specific high impact uses
- Desirable site attributes: access to infrastructure, community services, and congruency with surrounding developments
- Undesirable site attributes: current or past environmental hazards, proximity to toxic land uses, poor environmental mitigation, anticipated noxious land uses, proximity to natural hazards, distance from community

Supporting Safe Early Care Through Local Government and Planning Practice

- Long Range Plans: Include the importance of safe, healthy and equitable early care in long range plans and develop policies to support safe early care and assessment findings
- Zoning and Development Regulations:
 - Define early care
 - Use the development review process to implement goals
 - Implement incentives and other zoning tools to promote early care development and considerations of environmental health
- Model Planning Practices:
 - Create a checklist for early care providers
 - Develop criteria for the pre-identification of suitable early care sites in the community using maps and other tools
 - Develop permitting guides
- Collaboration: Involve others in the review process: public and environmental health officials, employers, large private early care providers and community advocates for early care

Early Care Planning Resources:

- North Carolina Child Care Resource and Referral Hotline: **1-800-600-1685**
- [Choose Safe Places Website – North Carolina](#)
- [NC Early Care and Learning Dashboard](#)
- NC DEQ: [Division of Waste Management Site Locator Tool](#)
- Center for American Progress (CAP): [US Child Care Deserts](#)
- National League of Cities: [Early Care Alignment Rating Tool](#)
- APA: [Report on Environmental Health Considerations for Early Care Siting](#)
- [Set It Up Safe](#): Planning Tool: Federal Choose Safe Places resource that describes conditions to consider during site selection process