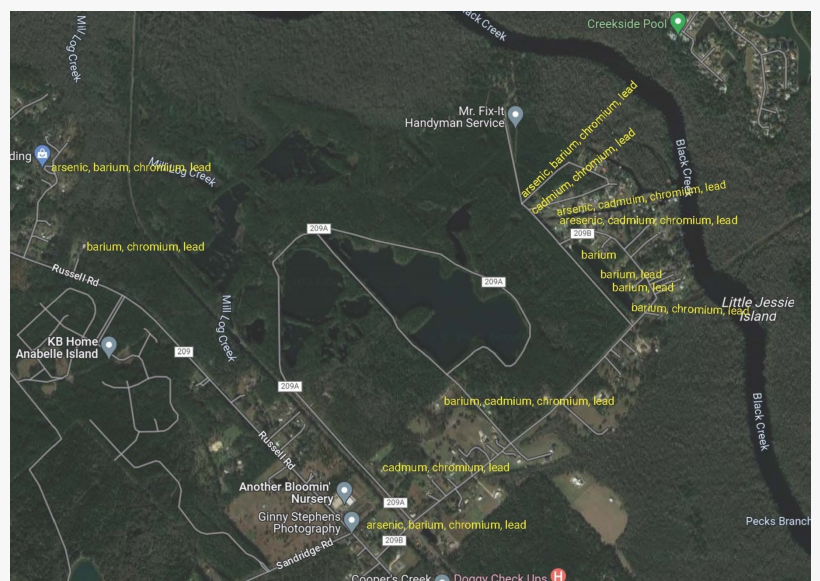


# After Years of Mysterious Illnesses, Florida Community Finds Toxic Metals from Abandoned Florida Solite Plant

*The Solite Task Force of Clay County Citizens has evidence of contamination at residences and public areas surrounding the former Florida Solite plant.*

GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, November 6, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Environmental samples show toxic metals including cadmium, barium, lead, chromium, and arsenic throughout the Russell Community. The tests were funded by residents of the community because even after decades of complaints, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) declined to do the testing.



Heavy Metal Contamination in Russell Community

Florida Solite, now known as Stoneridge Farms, operated a lightweight aggregate plant in the Russell Community of Green Cove Springs from the late 1950's until they abruptly abandoned the plant in 1995. Solite mined clay and processed it through high-temperature kilns, using hazardous wastes as fuel. Federal regulations governed the use of hazardous wastes as fuels, and if those regulations had been followed, little or no contamination would have occurred. However, EPA discovered massive contamination on the property as far back as 1990. EPA issued a consent order to the [parent company, Carolina Solite](#), in September 1996. The consent order only required action on about 230 acres (the plant processing area) of the 902-acre property. The remaining portions of the property, and the areas outside the property, were claimed to be "clean" by Solite, and both EPA and FDEP went along - despite at least four documented releases of water and sediments from a contaminated Solite holding pond into nearby Mill Log Creek.

The 1996 EPA consent order is still open after more than a quarter of a century. FDEP officials

expect to reach a conclusion soon, but the contamination remains in place.

Many in the local community believe they have been impacted. The community has been complaining since the early 1990's that a disproportionate number of people in the community, of all ages, have suffered a variety of cancers, heart diseases, respiratory illnesses, and other health issues. Some died.

Some limited testing in the "clean" areas was done around 2008, and some contamination was found, but those findings did not spur any cleanup actions.

Former Solite employees allege that equipment, vehicles, structural components, and drums of toxic waste were buried throughout the Solite property and dumped into ponds created from clay mining. The former employees identified possible burial sites. FDEP acted on that information in a limited way by requiring a few soil and groundwater samples to be taken in early 2023. Some contamination was documented, and some metal and fiberglass debris was found. The community requested more robust searches for buried drums and debris using commercially available technologies such as ground penetrating radar and magnetometers, but those requests have been ignored.

Representatives of the Citizens' Task Force met with officials from FDEP in Tallahassee on Tuesday, October 31. State Senator Jennifer Bradley and Florida House Member Sam Garrison also participated in the meeting. FDEP was presented with evidence of toxic metals found outside the Stoneridge Farms Property. FDEP pledged to keep the Citizens' Task Force informed on progress of their existing efforts but made no commitments regarding the new evidence of off-site contamination.

The Task Force is also concerned with ongoing efforts to sell the property. At least one potential purchaser, developer Michael Danhour, may be considering residential development on the contaminated property. FDEP is requiring a portion of the proceeds from a sale of the property be earmarked for cleanup, but the full cost cannot be known until the extent of the contamination is fully determined.

A nearby property on Russell Road, located just a few hundred feet from the Solite property, was recently purchased by the Clay County School Board as a future site of a public elementary school. No testing has been done to determine if that property has also been contaminated.

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