



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Removal of Fire-Related Contaminants Impacting Soil & Trees

Why is soil being removed at some District properties? In Spring 2025, environmental testing identified areas at nineteen campuses where fire-related contaminants impacting soil levels exceeded state screening thresholds. Eight campuses were cleaned up prior to the start of the 2025-2026 school year. PUSD is working under the guidance of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to address the remaining fire-related contaminants impacting soil at eleven sites. DTSC has reviewed the District's Fire-Related Campus Assessment Reports and Removal Action Workplans (RAWs) and determined that the fire-related contaminants impacting soil must be removed and replaced to protect the health and safety of our students, employees, and families. More information about the DTSC School Cleanup Program is available at: <https://dtsc.ca.gov/schools>. The reports are located on the DTSC website at <https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/> (search school name).

Is fire-related contaminant impacted soil removal a mandatory or regulatory requirement? Under the California Health and Safety Code, once fire-related contaminant impacted soil is identified creating a health and safety risk, DTSC is required to direct its removal. This is not discretionary. DTSC has determined that the fire-related contaminant impacted soil on PUSD properties poses a health and safety risk to students, staff, and the community.

Additionally, California schools that receive state funds for modernization or new construction must comply with both the California Education Code and all DTSC oversight requirements. PUSD is subject to both.

What campuses and sites are affected and being overseen by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)? DTSC is currently providing oversight on 15 PUSD properties across two categories:

11 Active Oversight Sites

Three of these 11 sites, Franklin Elementary School, Longfellow Magnet School, and San Rafael Elementary School, have site-specific, DTSC-approved Removal Action Workplans (RAWs). On April 16, 2026, DTSC held public RAW meetings for these three schools, presenting plans for soil removal work scheduled for Summer 2026. The final approved RAWs are available here:

- Franklin Elementary School ([EnviroStor](#))
- Longfellow Magnet School ([EnviroStor](#))
- San Rafael Elementary School ([EnviroStor](#))

[Video of DTSC April 16, 2026 Public Meeting Draft Removal Action Workplan](#)



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For the remaining eight sites, DTSC has reviewed and approved the Fire-Related Campus Assessment Reports and directed PUSD to remove and replace fire-related contaminants impacting soils to protect the safety of students and staff. DTSC will review the completed work to confirm that all removal activities meet required safety standards. The reports are located on the DTSC website at <https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/> (search school name).

The eight sites are:

- Blair High School
- Cleveland Elementary School (former site)
- Field Elementary
- Jefferson Dual Language Children's Center
- John Muir High School Early College Magnet
- Octavia E. Butler Magnet
- PUSD Education Center
- Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School

Four fire-burned campuses pending future review:

- Eliot
- Edison
- Noyes
- Loma Alta

More information about the DTSC School Cleanup Program is available at dtsc.ca.gov/schools.

Where can I find information about the progress of the DTSC soil removal work at PUSD school sites? Updates on DTSC-managed sites, including project status and key documents, are available through DTSC's public information resources at:

<https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/>. PUSD will also continue to share updates with the community as this work progresses: pusd.us/restoringourschools

Is this work safe for students, staff, and the community? Yes. Removal of fire-related contaminants impacting soil will take place only when students are not on campus. Environmental procedures will be used to ensure safety for the surrounding community. The majority of this work is being scheduled during summer break to ensure safety and minimize disruption. Replacement with clean soil and landscaping may occur while students are on site, as this work does not involve exposure to fire-related contaminant impacted soil. All activities are conducted under strict safety protocols, including secured work areas, dust control and monitoring measures, and safe transport of materials.



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How much soil will be removed? The total estimated quantity of fire-related contaminants impacting soil to be removed across the eleven sites is approximately 8,367 cubic yards, or roughly 13,390 tons. At an average of 22 tons per truck, this represents an estimated 613 total truckloads. Removals will be phased by location and timing; they will not all occur at once to reduce impact on neighbors.

How many trucks will be at each site? Truck activity will vary by location based on soil volume. Estimates are as follows:

Site	Est. Cubic Yards	Est. Truckloads*
Blair High School	2,240	~163
Cleveland Elementary School	430	~32
Field Elementary	65	~5
Franklin Elementary School	198	~15
Jefferson Dual Language Children's Center	45	~4
John Muir High School Early College Magnet	775	~57
Longfellow Magnet School	1,672	~122
Octavia E. Butler Magnet	275	~20
PUSD Education Center	545	~40
San Rafael Elementary School	1,867	~136
Washington Elementary STEM Magnet School	255	~19

**Based on 1.6 tons per cubic yard and 22 tons per truck.*

Note: At the Cleveland and Franklin Elementary School sites, there are no trees located in the fire-related contaminant-impacted soil areas.

What day and time will trucks be operating? For the Franklin site located in Altadena, truck activity may occur between 7 am and 7 pm, Monday through Saturday. For sites in Pasadena, truck activity may occur between 7 am and 7 pm, Monday through Friday, and between 8 am and 5 pm on Saturday, in coordination with the City of Pasadena. There are no fire-related contaminants impacting soil at PUSD sites located in the City of Sierra Madre.



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Truck activity for fire-related contaminant impacted soil removals will occur during scheduled work windows when campuses are closed or when work can be safely performed without students present. Removal of fire-related contaminant impacted soil will not occur while students are on site. Each site will have a defined work window to concentrate activity and limit disruption.

Truck and equipment activity will also occur during the restoration phase, including the delivery of clean soil and landscape replacement work. Portions of this work may occur while campuses are occupied, as restoration activities do not involve fire-related contaminant impacted soil and are performed under controlled conditions.

Detailed schedules will be developed and shared in advance of work, including truck haul routes. All work will be completed in accordance with local agency requirements.

What routes will the trucks use? Haul routes will be planned to prioritize major roadways and freeway access, avoid residential streets where feasible, minimize impacts during peak traffic hours, and comply with all local traffic and safety requirements.

Fire-related contaminant impacted soil being removed from the sites will be transported in tarped trucks or closed containers, in accordance with DTSC requirements, to prevent dust or debris from leaving the containers or trucks during transport.

Clean soil brought back to the sites will be delivered through a separate process using different trucks, with secure tarp coverings to control dust during transport.

Where will the fire-related contaminant impacted soil be taken? All excavated fire-related contaminant impacted soil will be transported to licensed and approved disposal facilities in accordance with DTSC requirements. Disposal sites are selected based on the type and level of contaminants present and must meet all applicable regulatory standards.

Will there be dust or noise? Contractors are required to implement environmental controls to minimize dust and noise, including watering excavation areas to manage dust, covering all truckloads, limiting work hours, and following approved traffic and safety plans. All excavated fire-related contaminant impacted soil will be transported in covered and secured containers or trucks designed to prevent dust, spills, or exposure during transport.

Who is overseeing the cleanup? The DTSC is the state agency that has directed this work and provides oversight. DTSC will review the final fire-related contaminant impacted soil removal completion reports. During the fire-related contaminant impacted soil removals, the District's environmental consultant, Verdantas, will be on-site conducting testing and monitoring to make sure contaminated soil is properly removed and that clean soil brought back to the site meets safety standards.



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What about tree removal at the various sites? As part of the fire-related contaminant impacted soil removal process, a number of trees located within fire-related contaminant impacted soil areas must be removed to allow safe excavation of the fire-related contaminant impacted soil, as required by the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). We recognize how much our trees mean to our school communities. PUSD is committed to restoring the landscape at each affected campus and will make every effort to restore removed trees with appropriately sized trees allowed under local and District tree policies. We continue to work closely with local partners to ensure our campuses remain welcoming, healthy environments for years to come.

At the Cleveland and Franklin Elementary School sites, there are no trees located in the fire-related contaminant impacted soil areas.

Who is overseeing the tree removal process? While the removal of trees in fire-related contaminant impacted soil areas is required by DTSC, to ensure this process is handled with the greatest care and expertise, PUSD has worked closely with the City of Pasadena and West Coast Arborists, Inc., a trusted firm with over 50 years of experience serving municipalities and public agencies across California.

What trees are being removed at each campus: how many, what species, and how old are they? Only trees located within identified fire-related contaminant impacted soil removal areas are required to be removed. Each affected campus has a unique mix of trees varying in species, age, and number. A full tree inventory report and map detailing the specific trees at each site are available here [All Sites Tree Removal Map](#) and pusd.us/restoringourschools.

How much will this work cost, and how is the District paying for it? This District is pursuing all available fire recovery funding and reimbursement opportunities for this work.

How do I find information on substances of concern in fire-related contaminant impacted soil? Please see link here: [DTSC-Lead-in-Soil-Fact-Sheet-August-2025.pdf](#), [Polycyclic Aromatic Compounds](#), [Arsenic in Soil: What You Need to Know](#)

Why are trees being removed if they're not in areas where students play? The decision to remove a tree is based on whether it's located in fire-related contaminant impacted soil, not on whether students typically use that area. DTSC determined that the identified areas containing fire-related substances in shallow soil are a health and safety risk and could expose students and staff through direct contact, dust inhalation, or accidental ingestion.

How does fire-related contaminant impacted soil spread beyond a tree's immediate area? Even if a tree sits in a planter or another out-of-the-way spot, the soil around it can still reach students through everyday activities (a gardener using a leaf blower, a ball kicked into a bush, etc.). That's why the location of the tree itself doesn't determine the risk.



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How did DTSC decide which trees needed to come out? PUSD tested soil across all of its campuses and sites for fire impacts and shared those results with DTSC. Based on that data, DTSC determined PUSD must remove and replace all fire-related contaminant impacted soil. Any trees, vegetation, or infrastructure rooted in that soil must be removed as part of this process. [See the DTSC letter.](#)

Why does DTSC hold schools to a stricter standard than parks and homes? The California Department of Toxic Substances Control ([DTSC](#)) holds school sites to exceptionally rigorous safety and cleanup standards. While schools and homes are both categorized under stringent "unrestricted land use" rules (unlike commercial or industrial sites), schools undergo a much more intensive, mandated screening and oversight process than standard residential neighborhoods or local parks.

After reviewing the District's soil testing results, the DTSC determined that for the campuses to be safe, the fire-related contaminant impacted soil must be removed to protect the health and safety of its students, staff, and community.

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