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Clean Up Plan For Ash Has Neighborhoods Patiently Waiting for Action



 **VIDEO** 6 p.m. Report

By [Roger Weeder](#)
First Coast News

JACKSONVILLE, FL -- The neighborhood surrounding the closed Mary McLeod Bethune School on the Northside is waiting for environmental action to remove contaminated soil from the playground. This community is one of dozens across the city exposed to ash and lead.

Darnell-Cookman Middle is the latest school campus that has been identified as having ash and lead that can be traced to city incinerators that burned waste decades ago. This weekend, the city plans to bring in soil as an interim measure to add a layer of protection to a former parking lot behind the school.

"We put money aside in 2001," says Susie Wiles with the mayor's office. "We are more than ready to get the appropriate approval so that we can get going."

Wiles says more than \$100 dollars is earmarked to remove contaminated soil. It's a process she says could take more than 10 years once the federal government signs off on the city's plan.

The Environmental Protection Agency in December gave its approval. The next step is getting the nod from the Department of Justice.

"We've been waiting since 1999," says Shelia Andrews, who was the PTA president at Mary McLeod Bethune when parents protested to get something done at the school. "The residents deserve to have that toxic waste site cleaned up."

The city says the Bethune site is at the top of the list to get soil removed.

Charles Williams, who lives near the school located off 33rd Street, says the neighborhood has change because of inaction.

"Some people have moved," he says. "A lot of people sold their homes and moved."

The ash and lead problem scattered across the Northside is tied to a practice decades ago, when people were encouraged to pick up and use ash for fill from incinerator sites.

So what once was free is now going to cost taxpayers in the neighborhood of \$100 million to clean up. Neighborhoods that have been waiting for years to see action are being told the redemption plan that's seven years old is still on go.

Neighborhoods like the ones near the Mary McLeod Bethune School say waiting is getting old. Nearly 10 years ago, parents protested outside the school, voicing their concern that something needed to be done.

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