IOWA | Health and Human Services

FACT SHEET

PLANNED LEAD AZIDE DETONATION FACT SHEET — November 20, 2026

Situation Overview

The U.S. Army is planning two controlled detonations of degraded lead azide at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant in Middletown, Iowa, on Friday, November 20, 2026, at approximately noon.

The detonation is expected to produce a dust plume containing lead particles that may travel beyond the installation and settle on surrounding surfaces. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued an emergency permit authorizing the operation. Iowa HHS was recently made aware of the planned detonation and is coordinating with other state agencies and federal partners to assess potential public health concerns and support local communities.

Potential Public Health Concerns

The primary potential exposure pathways include:

- **Airborne exposure:** Breathing in lead-containing particles following the detonation.
- **Surface exposure:** Contact with or ingestion of lead dust deposited on soil, playgrounds, vehicles, buildings, and other surfaces.

Lead is a toxic metal that can cause serious health effects. No safe level of lead exposure has been identified. Young children and pregnant women are at particular risk.

Monitoring and Potentially Affected Areas

The U.S. Army has released two maps identifying areas of potential airborne lead exposure and lead dust deposition. These are modeled projections, not confirmed measurements, and may change based on weather conditions.

The Army has indicated it will update its maps:

- Six hours before the detonation and hourly thereafter until detonation.
- Following the event, with a final estimate of the impacted area.

The Army will also communicate when the airborne exposure period has ended. Residents should follow the latest official instructions.

Current maps and updates: U.S. Army Installation Community Notifications

Recommended Public Health Precautions

Local public health agencies are encouraged to share the following recommendations with residents in potentially impacted areas:

- **Stay indoors:** Keep windows and doors closed for 24–48 hours after the detonation as a precaution, unless updated official guidance indicates otherwise.
- **Use indoor air recirculation:** Residential furnaces may continue operating. Facilities with outside air intakes, including schools and commercial buildings, should consider temporarily switching to recirculation when safe.
- **Improve indoor filtration:** Consider using a portable air cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter.
- **Monitor official updates:** Follow local news and the U.S. Army's website for plume updates and safety instructions.
- **Clean surfaces safely:** Once the airborne exposure period has ended, wet-clean potentially affected surfaces, including playground equipment, toys, and windowsills, using soap and water. Avoid dry sweeping that may redistribute dust. Consider washing your vehicle and replacing the cabin air filter if needed.
- **Limit unnecessary travel:** Avoid potentially affected areas when possible. Use vehicle air recirculation if driving through impacted areas.
- **Practice good hygiene:** Wash hands before eating or drinking and remove shoes when entering homes to limit tracking dust indoors.
- **Seek medical guidance:** Contact a healthcare provider if concerned about lead exposure or related health effects.

Blood Lead Testing and Health Concerns

Lead exposure may not cause immediate symptoms. Blood lead testing is the only recommended method for evaluating potential exposure.

- Individuals concerned about exposure should contact their healthcare provider to discuss whether testing is appropriate.
- Children younger than six and pregnant women warrant particular attention because of their increased vulnerability.

Healthcare providers can help determine appropriate testing and follow-up based on an individual's exposure history. Refer to Reportable Environmental and Occupational Conditions for instructions on reporting all blood lead tests.

Recommended Actions for Local Public Health Agencies

Local public health agencies should consider the following actions:

1. **Maintain situational awareness.** Monitor updated Army plume projections and official post-detonation announcements.
2. **Coordinate with local partners.** Share information with county emergency management, schools, childcare providers, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and EMS agencies.
3. **Support community preparedness.** Encourage organizations to review HVAC operations, outdoor activities, and procedures for minimizing lead dust exposure.
4. **Respond to public inquiries.** Provide consistent information about exposure prevention, environmental precautions, and access to blood lead testing.
5. **Communicate emerging concerns.** Coordinate with Iowa HHS and emergency management partners regarding significant community health concerns or suspected exposures.

Additional Information and Resources

U.S. Army — Detonation Information, Maps, and Updates
ASC Installation Community Notifications

U.S. Army — Frequently Asked Questions
Lead Azide Detonation FAQ

Iowa HHS — Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
Lead Exposure, Prevention, and Testing

Iowa HHS — Environmental Health Reporting
Reportable Environmental and Occupational Conditions

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Important: Information regarding the detonation, potential exposure areas, and recommended precautions may change. Local public health agencies should refer to the most current U.S. Army notifications and Iowa HHS guidance when communicating with residents and community partners.