

LET'S TALK ABOUT  
**EXIDE**

COMMUNITY SURVEY - FINAL REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2017



[www.publichealth.lacounty.gov](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov)



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## Background

Exide Technologies is a former battery recycling facility located in the City of Vernon that operated for many years without the correct permit from the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). The facility released harmful toxic chemicals into the air, including lead, arsenic, benzene, and 1,3-butadiene. Although the facility was permanently closed in March 2015, the soil in the surrounding communities of Commerce, Bell, Maywood, Huntington Park, Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and Vernon remains contaminated with high levels of lead.

The health risks resulting from years of toxic emissions from Exide compound the wide range of other challenges faced by residents. For example, the percentage of the population living in poverty (30%) is considerably higher than the percentage countywide (18%). Among adults 18 to 64 years of age, 16% do not have health insurance, compared to 12% countywide. Among children, 8% have been diagnosed with asthma, a likely underestimate of the true burden of the disease given that many children are undiagnosed.

The State DTSC is responsible for evaluating the level of soil contamination and carrying out clean-up efforts at local residences, schools, childcare centers, and parks within 1.7 miles of the Exide facility. As of the end of August 2017, DTSC had tested 82% of the 10,000 properties within this area and contamination was found on many parcels of land. According to DTSC, clean-up activities are planned to begin in September 2017.

The LA County Health Agency through the leadership of DPH is working with residents living in the communities around Exide to provide information about possible health risks and available services. On June 10, 2017, the Health Agency, in partnership with community groups and Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis carried out a large-scale outreach event to talk with residents who live in the 21,000 households around the former Exide facility. Outreach workers provided residents with information on available resources and services and gathered information from residents through a short survey to better understand their health concerns.

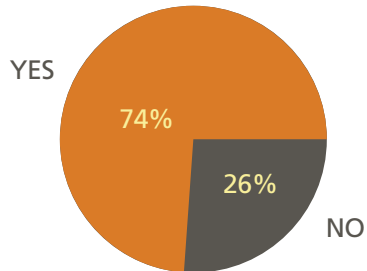
## Overview of the Survey

The Department of Public Health (DPH) in collaboration with community members and organizations developed a short survey in both English and Spanish with 15 questions. Outreach teams knocked on the doors of over 16,000 homes. An additional 4,200 homes were approached during the two weeks following the outreach event. Each team included at least one Spanish speaker and one English speaker. Completing the survey was voluntary and the questions could only be answered by someone living at the house who was 18 years of age or older. About 72% of people who answered the door agreed to complete the survey; in total 5,073 surveys were completed. This is a summary of the data that was collected.

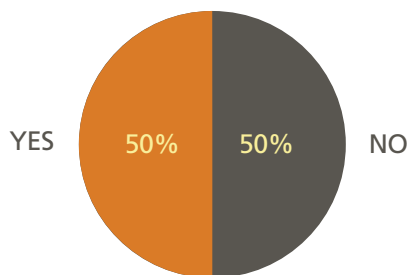
## What the Survey Found

[The results for each question in the survey are shown below. The results reflect the responses of all people who responded to that particular question. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.]

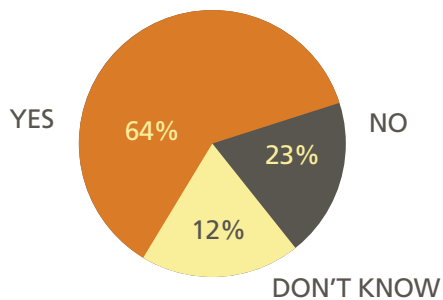
### 1. Do you know about Exide contamination and clean-up?



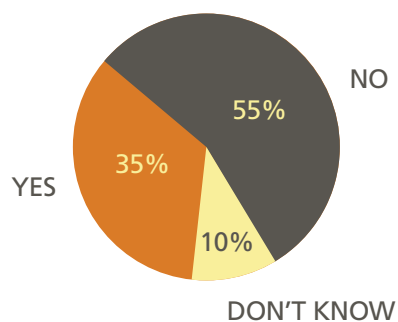
### 2. Are you satisfied with the progress of the clean-up activities?



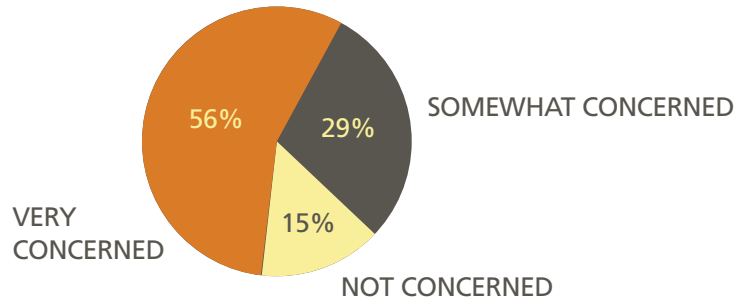
### 3. Soil testing was offered to everyone in this neighborhood. Was your yard tested for lead?



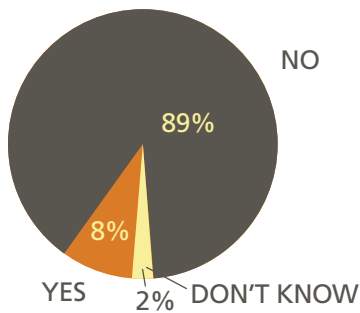
### 4. Have you or anyone in your home received the results from soil testing done in your yard?



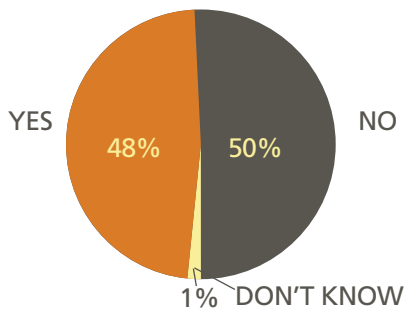
5. How concerned are you about your health or the health of others in your home because of exposure to contamination from Exide?



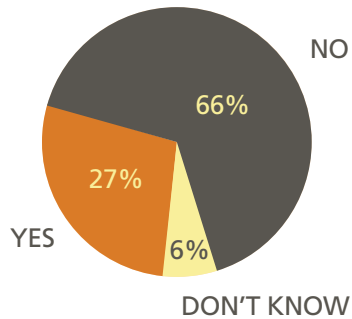
6. Are there any PREGNANT women who live or spend time in the home or yard?



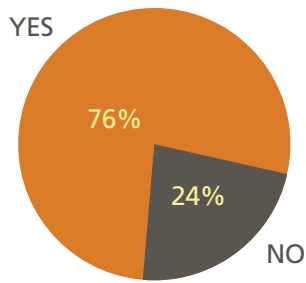
7. Are there any CHILDREN under 6 years old who live or spend time in the home or yard?



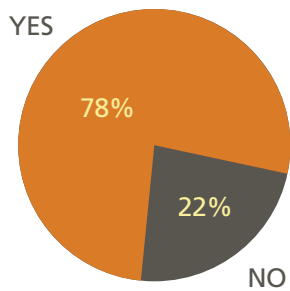
8. Has anyone in your home had their blood tested for lead?



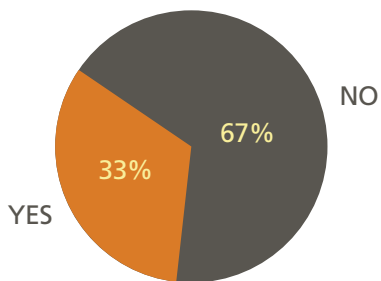
9. Are you concerned that you or a person in your home might get lead poisoning from living in this neighborhood?



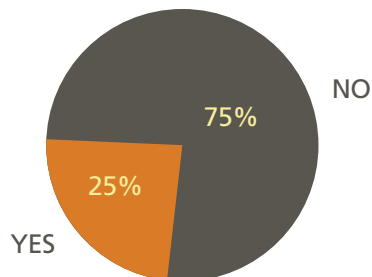
10. Are you concerned that you or a person in your home might get cancer from living in this neighborhood?



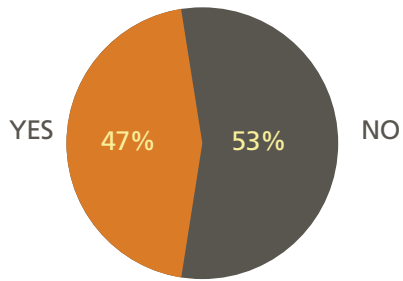
11. Are there any other health concerns you have because of living in this neighborhood?



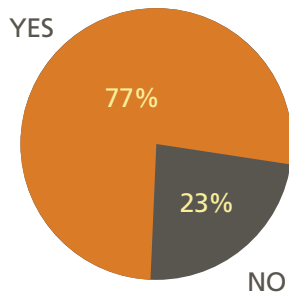
12. Have you or a person in your home sought medical care for the health concerns you mentioned?



13. Would you like a public health nurse to follow-up with you regarding your health concerns?

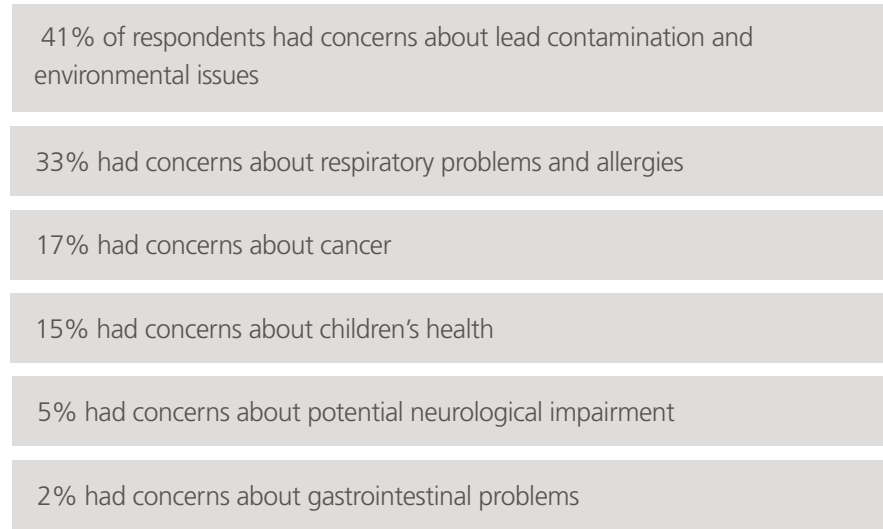


14. Would you provide your contact information so that we may follow up with you?





**In response to the question, “Are there any other health concerns you have because of living in this neighborhood?”:**



**Some examples of the concerns that were expressed include:**

<b>Environmental</b>	<p>I received a letter asking if we wanted our soil tested. But they only gave me [little time] to respond. They tested soil but provided no results.</p>
	<p>How will clean up [be] done in phase 2? Would like to have lead blood levels tested. Are they going to work on the soil outside of the house, like [the] sidewalk?</p>
<b>Health</b>	<p>Pollution in the air, lung effect, and water. What other contaminations exist? How does this affect not just my health but also property value?</p>
	<p>In the mail some information was sent for us to go to the hospital, but nothing else. We need to know where to go; lack of information. We need...respiratory &amp; blood testing. The wind [needs to be tested] &amp; more testing [is] needed.</p>
	<p>I am worried about my pet's health. I am also worried about myself, and my daughter because we have asthma.</p>
	<p>How long does it take to feel the effects of lead? If soil is replaced can lead still remain? Does it affect pets as well?</p>
<b>Clean-up</b>	<p>The water comes out brown. Especially the cold water. The water was black last week it is usually yellow.</p>
	<p>Are they going to come back (again) and clean up the lead? How long will it take cleaning up? How long will cleaning take? When are they coming to clean?</p>

## Conclusions

**Many who live in the communities surrounding the Exide facility are very concerned about the Exide contamination.**

- 3 out of 4 people who participated in the survey are concerned about their health and concerned that they or a family member might get lead poisoning or cancer as a result of living in the neighborhood.

**Few residents are able to seek medical care for their health concerns.**

- Only 1 out of 4 households have persons who have sought medical care to address their health concerns.
- Only 1 out of 4 households have persons who have been tested for lead.
- Nearly half of households who participated in the survey wanted a public health nurse to follow-up with them regarding their concerns.

**Many households have people who are at higher risk for health impacts from contamination.**

- Almost 1 out of 10 households have one or more pregnant women who live in the home or spend time in the home or yard.
- Almost half of households have children under 6 years old who live in the home or spend time in the home or yard.

**Many are not satisfied with the soil testing and clean-up activities.**

- Only 1 out of 3 households have received information on the contamination in their yard.
- Nearly half of households reported they are not satisfied with the progress of the clean-up activities.

## Recommendations from Community Members

The survey results confirm the high level of concern among residents living in proximity to the Exide facility. The results provide further evidence of the compelling need for rapid commencement of a comprehensive and thorough clean-up effort as part of a governmental response to addressing the health challenges and environmental injustice faced by the communities surrounding the Exide facility. Specific recommendations include the following:

### **1. Ensure that all residents have information about the current environmental conditions, potential health risks, and the actions needed to protect their health as a result of the release of hazardous materials from the Exide facility.**

Community members are in a better position to protect the health of their families if they understand conditions in their environment that can affect their health. Residents should have information about all the possible exposures from the Exide facility so they can be informed about the full spectrum of potential harm to their overall health and well-being and take action to ensure their good health. Communication strategies for presenting information should be specific to the needs of residents and should make use of all forms of media, including PSAs, radio, and social media.

### **2. Make sure that all residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the Exide facility have support securing access to affordable health care and specialized services.**

Additional outreach efforts are needed to connect residents to established providers and help eligible residents enroll in insurance programs. All residents need access to health and social services regardless of ability to pay or insurance status.

### **3. Enhance local health provider awareness of community health risks in order to effectively address health concerns of patients and direct them to appropriate screenings.**

Inform local clinical providers of the elevated risk of illness within this patient population. This enhancement of provider knowledge will enable the local healthcare community to focus on the major risk areas, and to direct patients to appropriate screening for the early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of disease.

**4. Increase support and services for young children living in the communities with soil contaminated by the Exide facility. This includes ensuring that all children participate in the blood-lead screening program and that support for children with long-term exposure to lead and/or elevated blood-lead levels is available at schools and community sites.**

DPH needs to partner with community organizations, health care providers, and schools to increase childhood participation rates in the blood-lead screening effort. Neighborhood schools need to partner with other organizations to offer enhanced services to young children and their families through nutrition programs, screening programs to assess developmental and cognitive growth, and differentiated educational opportunities that take into account a wide range of learning styles and abilities. Teachers and administrators at youth serving organizations need appropriate training to work with children and families that have been exposed to hazardous chemicals over an extended time.

**5. Require DTSC to provide residents with soil test results from their yards in a manner they can understand.**

Given the high number of residents reporting their soil was tested but have not yet received test results, the State DTSC should provide all outstanding test results to residents without delay. DTSC should provide the information in English and Spanish and provide a phone number for residents to call for help interpreting the results of the soil testing.

**6. Require DTSC to implement a community-supported comprehensive community clean-up plan and begin the removal of contaminated soil immediately.**

DTSC needs to immediately incorporate necessary changes in the Draft Clean-up Plan as proposed by community members and DPH. This includes modifying the criteria for prioritization and clean-up of residential areas; including assessment and clean-up of home interiors with elevated lead levels; and extending the clean-up onto the parkways that immediately adjoin the properties. Additionally, the State must establish a well-defined project schedule and clear lines of accountability, and ensure effective channels of communication with residents so they are well-informed as the project proceeds.

Local residents are appropriately concerned about their health. Planned clean-up activities have been delayed and do not include cleaning of home interiors, nor subsequent clearance that the homes are safe to occupy.





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Provided by Los Angeles County Department of Public Health  
in collaboration with:

- Communities for a Better Environment
- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
- Local residents impacted by Exide
- Monsignor John Moretta, Resurrection Church