

Investigation: South Florida's smaller airports top the country in lead emissions, but nearby residents remain unaware

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George Koren loves the Pembroke Pines home he has lived in for 48 years, just across the fence from North Perry Airport.

Magenta flowers bloom next to his pool. When the weather is bad, it's pleasant to sit on the patio next to the swimming pool and talk, uninterrupted by the sound of engines.

"When it's quiet and everything, it's gorgeous," Koren, 78, said. But on a rainy day in April, Koren and a neighbor knelt by the pool looking for black dust.

For decades, thousands of residents have lived just over the fence from the [airport](#), largely unaware of the possibility that the air they breathe could be contaminated with lead. The leaded gasoline that powers the planes over their heads was banned from cars in the 1980s because the lead additive, a neurotoxin, was deemed a threat to public health, particularly in children.

"No safe blood lead level in children has been identified," the American Academy of Pediatrics states on its website. "Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement."

Yet, banned nearly everywhere else, leaded fuel remains widely used in the [general aviation](#) industry, where tiny planes emit the neurotoxin into the air that people breathe. General aviation refers to civilian, non-commercial flights, typically at smaller airports.

Researchers have estimated that exposure to atmospheric lead from aviation has cost the U.S billions of dollars annually because of its blunting effect on people's IQs. But the extent to which it affects the people who breathe it in is unknown in South Florida.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that North Perry ranks fifth of all airports in the country for lead emissions. The airport is owned and operated by Broward County. But the Broward County Commission has never attempted to study the air surrounding the airport.

The EPA says the amount of lead emitted by small planes powered by piston engines, not jets, merits a public health endangerment finding, to be finalized as soon as this fall. The ruling would require the regulation of the fuel, though the agency also says that the level of lead in the air surrounding most airports is below the threshold necessary for government action.

Lead concentrations tend to be "well below" the National Ambient Air Quality Standards outside the fence line of most airports, Melissa Sullivan, a spokesperson for the EPA, said in an email. At more active airports, she said, areas near where planes conduct pre-flight engine checks have the highest concentrations, though they tend to be on the airport's property, enclosed within the fence.

Across the country, in San Jose, Calif., a county commission banned leaded fuel at its own airport, Reid-Hillview, after funding a study of the blood-lead levels of children living nearby.

The airport was found to exceed air quality standards in 2020, the San Jose Mercury News reported. It produces less lead than four of South Florida's general aviation airports: North Perry, Fort Lauderdale Executive, Pompano Beach Airpark and Miami Executive, according to EPA estimates.

But it's unclear whether the levels at North Perry exceed current EPA standards because so little testing has been done. Unlike at Reid-Hillview, the EPA has never actually measured the amount of lead surrounding the airport.

The soil on the airport grounds and in the communities surrounding it could also have elevated levels of lead, but Arlene Satchell, a spokesperson for the Broward County Aviation Department, which operates the airport, said she "is not aware of any studies conducted at North Perry Airport."

Angelo Castillo, a Pembroke Pines city commissioner who has often criticized the airport, said that, of all of the years he has served, he never heard about lead emissions.

"If the EPA has an indication that there might be a concern with respect to the air quality emanating from the airport, the county has a duty to study it and report to the public whether that air is safe," he told the South Florida Sun Sentinel. "And I hope they will do that without the slightest delay."

After the Sun Sentinel asked about the EPA estimates for lead around North Perry, county officials said they would take a closer look.

Satchell told the South Florida Sun Sentinel that the department "intends to review the EPA data with a specialized environmental consultant to ascertain what the numbers mean for (North Perry) to provide an informed response" and declined to comment on whether airborne lead could be a health concern for residents surrounding the airport "until BCAD and the consultant complete their review."

When asked if the aviation department had done anything to mitigate emissions or educate the community surrounding the airport about them, Satchell said, "The FAA, which regulates aircraft airworthiness, maintenance, and other flight-safety related issues has a plan for mitigating the use of lead-based aviation fuels by 2030," and redirected questions to "the FAA, small-aircraft engine manufacturers, and producers of aviation fuels."

Broward Commissioner Tim Ryan, who represents the district encompassing North Perry, said earlier this month that he had set up a call with Mark Gale, the director of the county aviation department, to talk about the issue.

"I would like to advocate for us having an open forum with representatives of the FAA and EPA, and if the Perry airport community is the appropriate venue, I support it," he said. "...I think there needs to be more communication with the federal officials about what the adverse health effects are and whether we can accelerate the timeline to transfer all of these planes over to unleaded fuel."

Both Broward Mayor Lamar Fisher and Broward Commissioner Beam Furr, who helped found the North Perry Community Advisory Committee, declined to comment.

Surrounded by neighborhoods

Located in the center of Broward, North Perry sits within the city limits of Pembroke Pines, but borders both Miramar and Hollywood. It is surrounded on all sides by residential neighborhoods, including several elementary schools, parks, and a veterans' hospital. Maxwell Park, which includes baseball fields and a playground, sits inside the fence that encloses the airport grounds.

The population surrounding the airport is only increasing. Meanwhile, North Perry is the busiest general aviation airport in Florida, expected to continue to grow over the next decade. Much of its activity is driven by its 11 flight schools. Students perform frequent takeoffs and landings, their flights often lasting only minutes.

Residents who live across from the airport say that they have witnessed several of their neighbors die from cancer over the years, but don't know

why. Though data from the state department of health shows multiple areas surrounding North Perry have higher rates of low birth weight, cancer deaths and cardiovascular deaths compared to the rest of the county, the closest air monitoring station to the airport doesn't test for lead. Only one of the county's six air monitoring stations, located in Davie, measures the pollutant.

Change is coming to the general aviation industry, albeit gradually. Nearly 20 years after environmental groups began calling for the EPA to release a finding that lead from aviation may endanger public health, in November 2022, the agency finally proposed the finding, the first step towards regulating it across the country.

The finding came shortly after the FAA finally approved an unleaded alternative that all piston-engine planes can safely use, though it has yet to arrive at airports. Meanwhile, a proposal led by Koren, the Pembroke Pines resident, for an air and noise quality study on North Perry is currently under consideration as the Broward County Commission reviews its budget for the upcoming year.

"We're starting to look at maybe some things that we might be able to do. I'm going to say the word 'might,' with never any promises," Michael Nonnemacher, the assistant director for the airport, said at a North Perry Community Advisory Board meeting in March, in response to Koren's request that the department limit flights. Koren represents Pembroke Pines on the advisory board.

Officials say their hands are tied when asked about regulating air quality and North Perry's increasing number of flights. They point to the Federal Aviation Administration, which requires federally funded airports remain accessible to all pilots.

Neither local governments nor the federal government can limit

operations at federally funded airports, an FAA spokesperson told the South Florida Sun Sentinel in an email, because "federal law requires airports be available to all users (barring a safety issue) if they have received federal funding."

At the advisory board meeting, Nonnemacher added, "The Federal Aviation Administration is in the business of promoting aviation. And when you have a public use airport with federal funds that help run the airport, you're obligated to do a number of things by federal law."

He told Koren that he would look into suggesting that some of the pilots adjust their flight patterns.

Ryan, the Broward commissioner, said that, though he supports further research into the issue, he is wary of challenging the FAA's authority, adding that the county is currently working with the FAA on a \$200,000 expansion of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

"I think we have a good relationship with the FAA," he said, "And I want to address this issue with not so much being combative as inquiring, and with a position of what we would like to see achieved."

Top source of lead

Since the banning of leaded gasoline from the automotive industry, general aviation became the No. 1 source of lead emissions in Florida and the country. These airports are some of the country's top lead-producing facilities, on par with steel mills, mines, smelting factories and battery plants, according to estimates from the EPA.

In addition to ranking fifth in the nation for lead emissions, North Perry ranks 49th of all facilities, period, according to the EPA data. And of the top lead-polluting airports in the country, it has the highest number of

people living within a 1-mile radius of the airport, according to research published by the environmental advocacy organization Earthjustice.

Koren, now retired, worked for the U.S Air Force as an electronics technician before moving to Pembroke Pines in 1974, where he did communications work for AT&T for 25 years. He watched North Perry evolve into a bustling hub for flight training and general aviation while the surrounding neighborhoods exploded in population. The neighbors hosted barbecues and pool parties, he said. As the plane traffic increased, residents retreated indoors.

"There's roughly 80 to 100,000 people within a two-mile radius between the cities of Pines, Miramar and Hollywood that are subject to this in some degree," Koren said. "Yet, because we're closest, we get the brunt."

Koren joined the North Perry Community Advisory Board three years ago. It was created just before the pandemic, he said, in an attempt to encourage more conversation between concerned residents and government officials who run the airport. Several of the people on the advisory board either work for the airport directly or have ties to the businesses there.

On a national level, lead has become one of the most pressing concerns for environmental regulators and the aviation industry, as some local governments seek to ban the fuel from their airports entirely. The federal government has set 2030 as a deadline to outlaw it.

But in South Florida, home to seven general aviation airports, three of which— North Perry, Fort Lauderdale Executive, and Miami Executive—the EPA estimates to be in the top 20 lead-emitting airports in the United States, most residents remain unaware of the pollutant. They worry far more often about the noise, the aesthetics, and the unnerving crashes near their homes. Last month, a banner-tow pilot died after

taking off from North Perry and crashing into the street next to a busy Target shopping center. A week later, another banner-tow pilot was hospitalized after crashing on the airport grounds.

Koren and a neighbor, Kit Jordan, say they have asked Pembroke Pines and Broward officials about pollution from the airport for years, but the city and county have done little to address their concerns as operations at the airport increase.

"I'm trying to draw the parallel, if you will, between what goes on inside of the fence and outside of the fence," Koren said. "Because all the focus has been completely on the inside."

Pembroke Pines Mayor Frank Ortis' office declined to comment, saying that questions should be directed to the county because it owns the airport.

The EPA data calculates lead emissions using information about each airport's activity, or landing and takeoff cycles, and the type of aircraft at each airport. The data is only one piece of the puzzle. The actual levels of lead emitted into the air surrounding South Florida's airports, and their effect on the surrounding community, remain unknown.

There appear to be no laws or reporting requirements for lead emissions at North Perry or any other general aviation airport in South Florida.

The Broward County Air Quality Division does not do source monitoring, said Monica Pognon, director of the Broward County Natural Resources Division. The county has six ambient air quality stations. Only one of the stations, located in Davie, monitors for lead, and only because it is part of a special network of 75 stations across the country that test for different metals.

The levels at the Davie station have been stable and "extremely low" for years, Pognon said.

The county used to monitor lead at another station in Pompano Beach, but stopped in 2001 because, after leaded gasoline was banned from cars, she said, "we didn't have a source for lead in Broward County."

When asked if she thought aviation could also be a source of lead in Broward, Pognon said, "I don't know."

"I can only go by the data that I see, so if I'm not monitoring near the airport, I can't say that there's an issue," she said.

The county's air quality division is funded by the EPA, and would only monitor chemicals or facilities under EPA orders, Pognon added. If the EPA determines that monitoring lead at general aviation airports is warranted, the county will do it. So far, that has not happened in Broward.

Still, the county could decide to do its own study of the air quality or blood-lead levels of residents surrounding the airport, like the county commission did in San Jose. So far, it has not.

Koren and Jordan want someone to study North Perry. They want to know what's in the air and the dust that settles in their pools, coats their patio furniture, and turns their white roofs black. Jordan said she asked the EPA to analyze a sample of the dust, but the agency told her that such a study would not be possible.

"We're just basically asking for a compromise," Koren said. "... especially the people that were here before (Hurricane) Andrew, I realize we're dwindling, but nevertheless."

At a Pembroke Pines commission meeting in June, Koren asked the city to send a resolution to the county asking it to approve the air pollution and noise study. Commissioner Jay Schwartz, whose wife is also a member of the North Perry Community Advisory Committee, replied that the commission needs to look at all the information that was provided to the advisory committee first and that "preliminary data thus far indicates that there isn't an issue."

Schwartz operates a flight school at North Perry, but said that he remains unbiased.

"My ownership in a flight school will not be a factor," he told the Sun Sentinel in response to questions over whether his position would influence his opinion of the study or other decisions about lead emissions at the airport. "I use unleaded fuel in aircraft that are approved to fly with Supplemental Flight Certification."

He added that his wife, Stacey Schwartz, voted in favor of the study.

"I complied with all required Broward County Ethics and County Ordinances at the time of my wife's Committee approval," Schwartz wrote in an email. Stacey Schwartz serves as Miramar Pembroke Pines Regional Chamber of Commerce Business Representative.

Others at the commission meeting were in favor.

"I think it's very important we specifically make the statement we're in support of this item being included in the budget," Commissioner Thomas Good Jr. said.

Lead health effects

Even small changes in the amount of lead in childrens' blood can have a

significant effect on their cognitive abilities.

The neurotoxin reaches the bloodstream as soon as it is inhaled as dust or ingested, where it damages the central nervous system and interferes with brain development, a particular concern for children. Once it enters the body, it can remain there for years.

Exposure to leaded gasoline from cars reduced the IQs of about half of Americans alive today by an average of 2.6 points each, according to a 2022 study led by two scientists at Florida State University. Only a tiny amount of exposure can have a significant effect on intelligence.

"Because the relative impact of lead exposure on cognitive ability is strongest at lower levels of exposure (i.e., the first units of lead exposure cause the greatest relative harm)," the scientists wrote, "we can be reasonably certain that the vast majority of [leaded gasoline](#)-exposed cohorts (i.e., those born in the mid-1960s to 1980s) experienced meaningful cognitive loss (>1 IQ point) because of lead exposure."

Multiple studies link IQ and lifetime earnings; some estimate that billions have been lost because of the impact of general aviation.

A 2016 study by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology calculated that exposure to atmospheric lead from general aviation emissions costs the country over \$1.06 billion in economic damages annually.

Significant lead exposure is also associated with a myriad of illnesses in adults, including hypertension, high blood pressure, and cancer.

Environmental justice groups have urged the EPA to regulate the leaded fuel in planes, known as avgas, for decades. In 2003, the organization Friends of the Earth requested that the agency release an endangerment

finding for the fuel, the first step towards regulating and eventually banning its use, according to Kelly Lester, a lawyer for Earthjustice, which represented the organization.

Twenty years later, in November 2022, the EPA finally released a proposed finding that leaded avgas endangers public health and welfare, the report to be finalized by 2023. Lester thinks the agency may have approached the issue with less urgency due to the fact that the technology for an unleaded alternative was not ready, meaning a ban on avgas would leave many pilots with no fuel options.

But the delay also meant the emissions continued for decades, while most of the people living near airports remained unaware.

"By slow-walking it they kept exposing or allowing hundreds of thousands of children that live and go to school near these airports to continue to be exposed to lead in the air," Lester said.

The EPA says that it has "moved forward expeditiously" to regulate emissions.

"We have actively engaged in the investigation of emissions of lead from aircraft engines operating on leaded fuel and the impact of these emissions on lead air pollution," Sullivan, the EPA spokesperson, wrote in an email to the South Florida Sun Sentinel in May. "We have completed this investigation and moved forward expeditiously to evaluate whether these lead emissions cause or contribute to air pollution which may reasonably be anticipated to endanger [public health](#) or welfare."

The EPA expects to release a final endangerment finding by fall 2023, after which it would "have a duty to propose and promulgate regulatory standards for lead emissions from aircraft engines," Sullivan said.

The Reid-Hillview Study

The EPA's proposed finding came a year after a 2021 study that emerged out of a long-simmering dispute between the residents of Santa Clara County, the county commission, and the aviation community at Reid-Hillview Airport.

North Perry Airport and Reid-Hillview are both county-owned, general aviation airports located near densely populated areas, with roughly the same number of annual operations.

In Santa Clara, after years of calls from advocates and officials to close the airport, the county commissioned a nearly 10-year study that found a direct association between childrens' proximity to Reid-Hillview and their blood lead levels (BLLs).

The study has since been published in the scientific journal *PNAS Nexus*.

At a public hearing about the EPA's endangerment finding in November, Maricela Lechuga, an airport commissioner for Santa Clara County, said she was "so outraged to learn about the lead exposure" that she began going door-to-door informing the neighbors about the lead issue.

"And many—many were—the majority of people did not know, had no idea that they were being exposed to lead," she said.

In response to the findings, the county commission voted to ban leaded fuel sales at the airport, to the chagrin of pilots and aviation officials who have long argued that such a ban would be unfeasible and illegal. However, pilots who fly in and out of Reid-Hillview can obtain leaded fuel at neighboring airports.

Until last year, much of the nation's current fleet of hundreds of

thousands of piston-engine planes could not fly on anything but avgas. Airport businesses like fuel suppliers and flight schools continue to rely on it. The FAA only approved a safe unleaded fuel for all aircraft, long in the works, in 2022. The fuel has yet to arrive at local airports.

Banning leaded fuel too quickly, aviation advocates said, would create a crisis that endangers pilots' lives. Some accused the commissioners of having ulterior motives because they want to close the airport, calling it a "land grab."

But the FAA has not forced the airport to remove the ban.

The study in question, which looked at over 17,000 blood samples from children living 1.5 miles or less from the airport over the course of nine years, concluded that "children proximate to Reid-Hillview Airport present with systematically higher BLLs."

Researchers calculated that children living within a half-mile of the airport have about a fifth of a microgram higher levels of lead in their blood than statistically similar children farther away, equal to about half the surge in childrens' blood lead levels during the peak of the Flint Water Crisis. The change was more pronounced for those living downwind of the airport.

The study also observed significantly higher blood-lead levels in children who commuted towards the airport, rather than away, to attend school.

Though most of the children did not exceed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's threshold for blood-lead, Christopher Keyes, a data scientist at the Mountain Data Group and one of the study's co-authors, told the South Florida Sun Sentinel that the threshold doesn't tell the full story. The amount of exposure for those living near airports is constant over the course of their lifetimes, not a one-time poisoning.

"Unlike the Flint Water Crisis, which occurred over an 18-month period, this is ongoing every day, 365 days a year," Keyes said. "So while the amount of exposure that we're finding among these residents proximate to the airport may be low by comparison to previous points in recent history, it's happening every day, all day."

The increase in blood-lead at low levels also has a greater impact than at higher levels, Keyes said.

"Though it's not as well known, there is some evidence suggesting that at these lower levels of blood lead, the marginal effect, or cons, of a small surge in exposure can have even greater impacts than at higher levels," he added.

No such study has ever been attempted in South Florida.

"Each airport is idiosyncratic with respect to traffic, winds, and the population nearby," Keyes said. "...If another group or municipality is concerned, hopefully our findings will help them understand whether they should have their own study done."

After the county enacted the ban at Reid-Hillview and another airport, San Martin, the FAA launched an investigation into the airports over alleged grant violations.

Then, after signing a "memorandum of understanding" with the county, the agency suspended both investigations, instead inviting the airports to participate in a demonstration project studying "best practices for transitioning airports nationwide to unleaded aviation fuel," according to a county news release in February.

Both Reid-Hillview and San Martin "expect to be among the first in the nation to sell 100-octane unleaded avgas when it becomes available this

year," the release said.

South Florida airports

Four of the airports with the highest levels of lead emissions in the country, according to EPA's 2020 data, are located in densely populated areas in South Florida.

North Perry ranks highest among them, emitting around 1,000 pounds of lead each year, according to the EPA calculation.

It is closely followed by county-owned Miami-Executive Airport, ranking 11th with a little over 800 pounds, then city-owned Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, ranking 18th with over 700 pounds. Further down the list, city-owned Pompano Beach Airpark is also a top emitter, ranking 28th in the country with over 650 pounds.

"(Fort Lauderdale Executive's) emissions have decreased over the past 20 years due to a reduction in operations and a change in fleet mix from piston aircraft to more jet aircraft," Arlene Borenstein, a spokesperson for the City of Fort Lauderdale, told the Sun Sentinel.

When asked if the airport has done anything to limit lead emissions or educate the community, Borenstein, like North Perry spokeswoman Satchell, deferred to the FAA.

"Currently there are no mitigation steps as unleaded fuels are in the development and testing process," Borenstein said in an email. "The FAA does not allow the banning of aircraft or fuel as 100LL is the only currently available fuel for piston-driven aircraft."

Spokespeople for Miami-Executive Airport and Pompano Beach Airpark did not respond to requests for comment.

North Perry's 11 flight schools account for about three-quarters of the airport's operations, according to a Florida Department of Transportation report. Students at these schools perform "touch-and-go's," where they land the plane on a runway, then take off again without fully stopping, several times a day. Many of the flights out of North Perry last no longer than a few minutes.

"Sometimes it'll start at 6 a.m., go to between 10 and 11, that's 12 to 15 hours," Koren said. Counting 100 planes in an hour "is not unusual," he added.

The departure phase of the flight also produces the most lead; about 80% of [lead emissions](#) are released during this phase, according to the EPA.

"They're at full throttle because they're taking off, maxing out power, that's when emissions are greatest," Koren said. The planes fly so low, he added, that "Kit can reach out and touch them with her pool stick."

One of North Perry's fuel depots, Bobby's Landing, does currently offer a brand of unleaded fuel, called REC-90, airport spokeswoman Satchell said. She didn't know what percentage of aircraft at the airport use the fuel.

An employee for Bobby's Landing said Tuesday that the depot acquired the fuel two months ago and only a small percentage of aircraft use it.

Still, North Perry is one of the only airports in Florida to offer unleaded fuel available at all, Satchell said.

"Of note, our research shows only a few general aviation airports in Florida sell unleaded gasoline, including North Perry and Naples Airport," she wrote in an email.

Population surrounding airport grows

The residential neighborhoods surrounding North Perry are made up of young, working-class families, and a smaller, waning number of older residents like Koren and Jordan.

As the years have gone by, the neighborhood has seen more turnover, which makes it difficult to form community associations or spread awareness about issues related to the airport, Jordan, a realtor, said.

The population surrounding the airport continues to increase. North Perry's census tract alone grew from just over 6,000 people in 2013 to nearly 7,100 in 2021, according to data from the Florida Department of Health.

Many of the newer residents who move to the neighborhood are younger families, Jordan said, drawn to the "price and the location."

The U.S Navy built the airport in 1943 to use as a training field during World War II. It became part of Broward County in 1957. In the decades since, it has become Florida's busiest hub for general aviation.

As neighboring Fort Lauderdale Executive decreases its numbers of piston-engine aircraft to accommodate more jets, those planes move to North Perry.

North Perry is forecasting more growth; its 2020 master plan estimated that it would see increasing operations through 2035. Already, annual operations in both 2019 and 2022 exceeded the 2035 forecast.

Unleaded Fuel

The transition to unleaded fuel is already underway across the nation. Last year, the FAA approved the first unleaded alternative for all general aviation aircraft, created by General Aviation Modifications, Inc, or GAMI, after years of testing to ensure the fuel's safety.

Pat Anderson, professor of Aerospace Engineering and the director of the Eagle Flight Research Center at Embry Riddle in Daytona Beach, was one of the people involved in the testing. Though he underlined the need to ensure pilot safety, he said that the process of approving an unleaded fuel could have taken less time.

"My gut is that it took a long time," Anderson said. "I guess if I had to come down and answer I'd say yeah, we probably should've figured out a way to move a little faster."

Another unleaded fuel created by the company Swift Fuel is also already available at several airports, including Reid-Hillview. The fuel works in about two-thirds of existing piston engine planes.

Now that the FAA has confirmed that GAMI fuel is safe for all existing aircraft, the next hurdle will be rolling it out to general aviation airports and making it a viable alternative to avgas.

"I know they would like it in Florida," Anderson said. With all of the general aviation and flight schools, he said, it will probably be "high priority."

But even after the rollout of GAMI fuel, avgas wouldn't disappear unless mandated, and people would keep buying it. The fuel is likely to be much more expensive, Anderson said, unless it is subsidized.

"So the question might be, do they have to subsidize initially to get that out there?" he asked. "Or is it done with regulation, do they ban 100 low-

lead and say there's a point at which fuel has to go, and regulatory would drive it, not economics?"

Health effects

In addition to lead's effects on childrens' cognitive development, studies have demonstrated connections between lead exposure and deaths from cancer and cardiovascular disease. Lead is also a contributing factor in hypertension, strokes, low birthweight and infant mortality.

Several of the census tracts that surround and include North Perry have higher rates of low birth weight, cancer deaths and cardiovascular deaths compared to the rest of the county, according to data from the Florida Department of Health.

But the residents in those tracts are also vulnerable for other reasons; many are minorities or low income, and may already be predisposed to the same health issues. Without more research, a connection between the airport and the community's health cannot be drawn.

The quantity of lead in the blood of those living close to North Perry or other South Florida general aviation airports is not publicly available. Though the Florida Department of Health in Broward County provides data on a variety of health issues by census tract and ZIP code, it would not provide the South Florida Sun Sentinel with data on blood-lead levels, citing a Florida Statute that "information submitted for an epidemiological investigation is confidential and exempt from disclosure."

Even with that data, a study similar to the one conducted at Reid-Hillview would be necessary to pinpoint whether North Perry or any of South Florida's general aviation airports are connected to the blood [lead](#) levels of children on the other side of the fence.

The health question hangs over Jordan and Koren as they go about their lives, each plane that passes by simply a reminder.

"We try to live a healthy lifestyle and everything, but it's always in the back of our minds," Koren said.

Jordan said she looks at all the younger families moving in.

"I'd like to make it better for them and their babies," she said. "Make it healthier."

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