



CSX SITE IN DUNNELLON RAILROAD TIE FIRE INCIDENT

What happened?

On Feb. 1, 2026, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) was notified of a fire involving railroad ties in Dunnellon. The ties were treated with creosote, a wood preservative commonly used for outdoor infrastructure. Emergency response activities by state and local agencies began immediately, and the fire was extinguished Feb. 2, with limited smoldering continuing through Feb. 3.

After the fire was extinguished and site conditions stabilized, DEP began coordinating with CSX and its environmental cleanup contractor, Arcadis, on ongoing cleanup activities.

Is there a risk to public health?

Based on sampling conducted to date, there is no indication of a threat to public health. Air monitoring equipment was deployed during the fire and did not detect any monitored air pollutants at levels of concern. Expanded air monitoring is being conducted during excavation to protect workers and nearby residents. Surface water samples collected near the site did not exceed Florida's cleanup target levels for semi-volatile organic compounds.

Has drinking water been affected?

No. The area is served by a municipal water system supplied by groundwater wells located about three-quarters of a mile or more from the site. This system is routinely tested to ensure compliance with state and federal drinking water standards.

The Florida Department of Health will also sample private wells within one-half mile of the site if access is granted by property owners. Groundwater sampling will be conducted if soil analysis indicates it is necessary.

What is creosote?

Creosote is a wood preservative derived from coal tar. It has long been used to treat railroad ties and utility poles to protect wood from decay and insect damage.

Why is creosote a concern during a fire?

Smoke and ash from burning creosote-treated wood can contain compounds such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), creosols and particulate matter. During a fire, these substances can be released into the air and may settle onto soil and other surfaces. Some components can remain in soil if not removed.

What testing has been performed?

Soil samples were collected early in the response to characterize the material, which was determined to be non-hazardous. Surface waters near the site were sampled and analyzed, and results did not exceed Florida's applicable cleanup levels for semi-volatile organic compounds.

Air monitoring equipment was deployed in surrounding areas, including nearby neighborhoods, during the fire and continues during excavation. Monitoring is in real time, using stationary equipment on site and portable monitors nearby. Results so far indicate protective measures being implemented to prevent emissions are working as intended.

Soil samples are being collected as excavation progresses, including from the sidewalls and the bottom of the removed area.

What steps are being taken to clean up the site?

CSX, with its environmental contractor, Arcadis, submitted a cleanup plan that was reviewed and approved by DEP. The plan outlines how impacted soil and materials will be safely removed, sampled and properly disposed.

Key activities in the cleanup plan include:

- Air monitoring during excavation to protect workers and nearby residents.
- Excavation of the top two feet of soil across the affected area (approximately 1,150 feet long) with disposal at a permitted lined landfill.
- Soil sampling from the excavation, including sidewalls and the bottom, to ensure all impacted material is removed.
- Surface water sampling downgradient of the site to monitor nearby water bodies.

- Installation and sampling of groundwater monitoring wells if soil results indicate it is necessary.
- Backfilling excavated areas after soil removal and confirmation sampling.
- Submission of a Source Removal Report documenting all actions, sampling results and disposal methods.

DEP's emergency responders will be on site throughout excavation and related restoration activities to provide direct oversight and ensure the plan is carried out as approved.

What protective measures are being implemented to prevent emissions?

Before excavation, the impacted railroad ties and soil are sprayed with water to reduce dust. Expanded air monitoring is being conducted throughout excavation, including for pollutants commonly associated with fires of this type, such as PAHs, creosols and particulate matter. Real time monitoring uses stationary and portable equipment to track conditions and prevent materials from becoming airborne or leaving the site.

Will groundwater be sampled?

Groundwater sampling will occur if soil analysis show elevated levels of contaminants. Monitoring wells will be installed and sampled at the source and downgradient of the site to ensure potential impacts are identified and addressed.

Who is overseeing the response?

DEP is actively overseeing cleanup and coordinating with CSX, Arcadis, the City of Dunnellon, Dunnellon Police Department and Marion County Emergency Management to ensure continued protection of public health and the environment.

Where is the removed material going?

Removed material is sent to the appropriate disposal facility based on testing and material type:

- Unburned railroad ties: Transported to a CSX facility in Alabama.
- Partially burned railroad ties: Disposed of at a permitted Class I landfill or, with appropriate testing, at a Class III landfill with a liner, specifically selected to protect soil and groundwater.
- Ash and impacted soil: Disposed of at a permitted Class III landfill with a liner specifically selected to protect soil and groundwater.

Testing confirmed the ash and impacted soil are non-hazardous, allowing them to be disposed of at the selected lined Class III landfill. Using this landfill helps preserve capacity at Class I landfills.

How long will cleanup take?

Under state emergency response regulations, the cleanup of railroad ties and soil impacted by the fire must be completed within 30 days of discovery. Within 60 days of completing removal, CSX must submit a Source Removal Report documenting all actions taken, disposal methods and sampling results.

What should people do if ash landed on their homes or property?

Ash can be inhaled if it becomes airborne. To minimize exposure, avoid stirring up or sweeping ash dry.

If ash settled on your home, patio furniture or other surfaces, it can be cleaned up safely using these steps:

- Wear long sleeves, pants, socks, shoes and gloves.
- Lightly mist indoor and outdoor surfaces with water before sweeping, then follow with wet mopping.
- If using a vacuum, use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) type.
- Use as little water as possible when wetting ash.
- Wipe down furniture, outdoor items or vehicles with a damp cloth.
- Children, older adults and people with heart or lung conditions, such as asthma, should not participate in cleanup activities.

Dispose of ash according to local trash guidelines; do not attempt to burn it.

How does this incident compare to other high-profile rail incidents?

While any fire involving industrial materials can raise concern, this incident is very different from large-scale hazardous chemical releases that have occurred in other states. It involved creosote-treated railroad ties, not bulk industrial chemicals, pressurized tank cars or hazardous chemical shipments.

Sampling conducted to date indicates the material is not hazardous waste, and cleanup is underway under DEP's oversight.

