

Media Outreach Letter – Urgent Public Health and Environmental Concern

Subject: Urgent Local Health and Environmental Concern — Leaded Fuel & Chronic Aircraft Noise over Canton and Surrounding Towns

Dear Investigative team,

We are reaching out on behalf of concerned residents from Canton and the surrounding communities impacted by daily low-altitude flight-school operations from Norwood Memorial Airport. These flights are exposing families, schoolchildren, and entire neighborhoods to continuous noise pollution and airborne lead emissions — a public-health issue that remains largely unreported in Massachusetts.

The aircraft flying hundreds of repetitive training circuits over Canton still burn leaded aviation gasoline (100LL) — a fuel banned decades ago for all cars and trucks (U.S. EPA, 2010; National Academies of Sciences, 2021). The EPA and FAA confirm that piston-engine aircraft are now the single largest remaining source of airborne lead in the U.S., accounting for roughly 70 percent of total lead emissions (EPA & FAA Joint Analysis, 2022). Canton's 2023 Childhood Lead Screening Report (MA Department of Public Health – CLPPP) shows a sustained increase in local children's blood-lead levels since 2019, corresponding with the sharp rise in overflight frequency. Training flights routinely pass 200–1,000 feet over homes, schools, and playgrounds, producing repetitive noise peaks of 70–100 dB — levels linked by the World Health Organization (2018 Noise Guidelines) to reading delays, hypertension, and chronic stress in children.

The Norwood Airport Commission continues to advance operational and runway-expansion plans with no representation from affected surrounding towns and no environmental-impact or noise study that includes Canton, Westwood, Dedham, or Sharon. Our Select Board and Board of Health have repeatedly requested data, studies, and mitigation actions — yet the Commission has not responded. Our state and federal legislators have been notified (Senators Markey and Warren, Representative Lynch, Representative Galvin, and others), but the situation remains unresolved.

While these impacts are being felt most visibly in Canton, similar conditions exist around other Massachusetts general-aviation airports that rely on the same piston-engine flight-training operations and leaded fuel supply chains. Communities near Norwood, Beverly, Plymouth, Bedford, and Lawrence airports have all reported repetitive low-altitude flight patterns, noise complaints, and potential exposure to lead emissions. This suggests a broader statewide pattern that has yet to receive coordinated investigation or media coverage. Our group can speak directly to the Canton experience, and we encourage your newsroom to explore the regional scope and systemic causes behind these public-health and environmental-justice concerns.

Most residents — and even many officials — do not realize that these aircraft still use leaded fuel. Children and families under the flight path are being exposed daily to fine lead particulates and toxic exhaust that settle onto homes, yards, and playgrounds (EPA Integrated Science Assessment for Lead, 2013; CDC ATSDR Lead Toxicity Module, 2021). Lead exposure, even at very low levels, is known to damage developing brains and impair learning, attention, and hearing (NIH Environmental Health Perspectives, 2015). Chronic aircraft noise exposure adds a second stressor: studies show reading and comprehension delays of up to six months in children near airports (Clark & Stansfeld, RANCH Study, Lancet 2005), as well as elevated blood pressure and sleep disruption (WHO 2018).

Beyond the immediate environmental impacts, a fundamental problem is the absence of community representation or public input in the Norwood Airport's decision-making process. None of the surrounding towns most affected by noise and pollution — including Canton, Westwood, Dedham, and Sharon — have a formal voice in the Airport Commission's operations, planning, or expansion reviews. This lack of representation leaves residents without any avenue to influence decisions that directly affect their children's health, property values, and quality of life. We believe this is a serious gap in public governance that deserves attention and reform.

We urge your newsroom to investigate and publicize this issue — to inform the public and prompt the transparency and accountability our families deserve.

- Interview affected residents, educators, and health experts.
- Request public records from the Norwood Airport Commission, FAA, and MassDOT Aeronautics Division.
- Examine why Massachusetts still uses a 5 µg/dL “level of concern” while the CDC lowered the national reference value to 3.5 µg/dL in 2021, even as Canton's rates rise.
- We also urge you to examine how such airports operate without resident representation or oversight, despite direct public-health impacts.

While our experience centers on Canton, we ask your team to examine the larger network of general-aviation airports operating under similar conditions across Massachusetts. The same agencies, fuel suppliers, and training programs are involved statewide — yet there has been no public environmental or health review. This story deserves comprehensive regional coverage.

Our grass roots Airport Pollution Initiative has compiled scientific references, official lead data, and a documented timeline of correspondence with local and state officials. We would be happy to provide all supporting materials and connect you with community representatives and medical experts.

Additional References:

<https://www.saveourskiesalliance.org/massachusetts.html>

<https://nomassairnoise.org/>

Thank you for helping shed light on this urgent, local environmental-health crisis.

Sincerely,
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Key Source Citations

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2010). Lead Emissions from Piston-Engine Aircraft Using Leaded Aviation Gasoline, EPA-420-R-10-023.
- National Academies of Sciences (2021). Options for Reducing Lead Emissions from Piston-Engine Aircraft.
- EPA & FAA (2022). Joint Analysis of U.S. Lead Emissions Inventory.
- CDC / ATSDR (2021). Lead Toxicity Training Module.
- NIH (2015). Health Effects of Airborne Lead. Environmental Health Perspectives, Vol 123 No 8.
- WHO (2018). Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region.
- Clark & Stansfeld (2005). RANCH Study: Aircraft Noise and Children's Cognition and Health, Lancet 365:1942-49.
- EPA (2013). Integrated Science Assessment for Lead (EPA/600/R-10/075F).