



Clean Air Coalition
of Western New York

October 7, 2011

341 Delaware Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14202
716.852.3813
www.cacwny.org

Dear Councilmember Golombek,

After the Niagara Lubricants fire in July of 2011, residents who reside in the neighborhood surrounding Chandler St. have expressed serious concerns about how the emergency was handled and believe that the emergency response to industrial fires is inadequate.

In 1986, Congress passed the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA), which established Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC) across the United States. These LEPCs were intended to identify chemical hazards, plan for emergencies, convey public information, and include all stakeholders. Locally, we are concerned that the mostly-volunteer LEPC is not able to fulfill the vision of EPCRA, particularly for community involvement, hazard communication, and hazard reduction.

There are many facilities throughout the City of Buffalo that may pose a risk to health and safety of residents if a quality emergency response system is not in place or if regular inspections are not completed. In addition to Chandler St, there have been two other fires at industrial facilities in residential neighborhoods since July of this year. There needs to be quality, inter-agency communication and partnership, with representation from residents to prevent and react to disasters like this in the future.

As we believe you know, the City of Buffalo's emergency disaster coordinator position has been left vacant for a few years. According to our research the last person who filled this position was Rodger Landor. At the public accountability session on August 15th Fire Commissioner Whitfield stated that he is acting as the city's emergency response coordinator during this vacancy. Given the number of aging industrial facilities in residential neighborhoods in this city and the number of recent fires we believe the city's residents would be better protected if the city filled this position with another person who can dedicate all of his or her time to developing robust, effective emergency prevention and response plans in partnership with the most affected communities.



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Other LEPC's have used the *Report Card" for Your Local Emergency Planning Committee*, created by the Working Group on Community Right-to-Know, to evaluate and improve emergency prevention and response. The entire document is attached to this letter. Below are questions that have been prioritized:

1. What is the chain of command for disaster response?
2. Who makes the call when residents are evacuated?
3. Why has the emergency response coordinator position been left vacant for so long?
4. What mechanisms are currently in place to communicate with residents (other than mass media) when there is a chemical fire or disaster?
5. How frequently are these plans updated, and who is responsible for doing that?
6. What trainings has the fire department been sent to regarding emergency and disaster response?
7. Does the fire department have the adequate funding to send their leadership to emergency disaster response funding?
8. What is the attendance record of the fire commissioner at the LEPC meetings since he has been sworn in?
9. Has the fire commissioner (as the acting emergency response coordinator) evaluated the protective capacity of shelter and place structures?
10. Does each neighborhood have planned shelters and evacuation routes? How are those communicated to the public?
11. Who keeps track of the MSDS sheets of facilities? How are these sheets shared with the Police and Fire Departments, and residents?

Thank you for your help on this issue. We look forward to talking more as these progresses.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Newberry
Program Coordinator
Clean Air Coalition of WNY