

The Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study

Fact Sheet

Prepared by the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York

In October of 2009, the NYS DEC released the final report of their air quality study in Tonawanda. The report was over 200 pages long so we've pulled out the information we thought was most useful – enjoy!

How the DEC collected the data

The DEC collected air samples for a year. "Four air quality monitors were installed in and around the community in reference to the prevailing wind direction from the southwest." Three monitors were placed down wind of our industrial neighbors on Grand Island Boulevard, in the Brookside Terrace neighborhood and by the Sheridan Park water tower. The fourth monitor was placed in Beaver Island State Park in Grand Island.

What they found

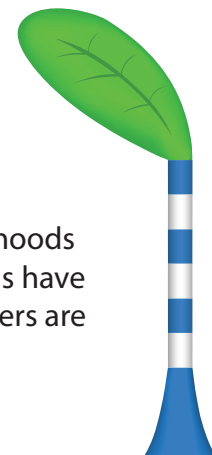
High levels of benzene coming from industrial sources. The air monitors found that benzene levels were much higher when compared to other parts of New York. They also found that Tonawanda Coke was the, "...single largest benzene source contributing to the high benzene emissions monitored."

The study was also quite clear that mobile sources (cars, trucks, etc.) are only a small piece of the problem. All four monitors showed the benzene came from the direction of the industrial area. Mobile sources account for less than a quarter of the emissions. The study, "...clearly demonstrate[s] that the benzene monitoring results are dominated by stationary source emissions and not mobile source emissions."

The study also showed that other industrial emitters of benzene are in compliance. It reports: "...inspections by Regional staff indicated that NOCO Energy and Tonawanda Sunoco were in compliance and their emission control equipment was operating appropriately."

High levels of formaldehyde. It seems the formaldehyde comes from some combination of mobile and industrial emissions. "According to the point sources of formaldehyde in order of greatest mass emissions are: Indeck Yerkes, NRG Huntley power plant and Unifrax Inc." Currently, the reporting of formaldehyde is not mandatory.

There is enough carcinogenic material in the air to put our community at risk. The emissions from Tonawanda Coke alone put people in many of our neighborhoods at a higher risk of developing cancer over their lifetime. The study reported: "Based on the assessment of the monitored and modeled data, the maximum individual cancer risk and population cancer risk associated with facility-wide emissions from the Tonawanda Coke Corporation exceeds a lifetime cancer risk of 10 in-one-million for the nine census tract Study area. Specific neighborhoods exceed a 100 in-one-million cancer risk level." Put simply, people in many of our neighborhoods have a greater chance of developing cancer because Tonawanda Coke is their neighbor. Both numbers are higher than the minimum required by both the NYS DEC and EPA's standard for action.



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Conclusions

We're still not sure why there is a big difference between the numbers Tonawanda Coke reports and the numbers recorded in the study.

"The reason for this discrepancy appears to be the under reporting of benzene emissions by the Tonawanda Coke Corporation. The additional coke oven facility benzene emissions could be the results of leaks and/or other releases of benzene that are not accounted for by the facility in their annual actual emissions statements or they could be the results of inaccuracies in the USEPA approved emission factors used to determine facility emissions."

Tonawanda Coke does not measure its emissions. It calculates emissions from a model that EPA provides. It may be that the EPA model was wrong, it might be that Tonawanda Coke is not being honest, or it may be a combination of both. Further testing will help determine why there is such a discrepancy.

What's next?

"The results of the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study clearly indicate that further actions are needed to reduce ambient concentrations of benzene and formaldehyde in the community and that further monitoring must be continued to measure any progress in current and future emission reduction strategies."

The DEC continues to monitor the air in the study area. They have asked Tonawanda Coke to make small changes inside the plant to reduce benzene emissions, including venting from the light oil storage tank and installing ammonia controls that are expected to reduce approximately 800,000 pounds per year of ammonia, 3,000 pounds per year of benzene, and smaller amounts of toluene, xylene, and naphthalene.

The EPA is requiring Tonawanda Coke to do further testing to determine more precisely the benzene emissions from the plant. Tonawanda Coke continues to fight the EPA request and deny they are the primary producer of benzene.

About us

The Clean Air Coalition of Western New York is a community-based organization that informs and organizes residents to prevent and reduce pollution. The Coalition is creating a constituency of citizens that hold leaders accountable for our communities health and creates a political cost for those who fail to take necessary action.

The Clean Air Coalition of Western New York
1250 Niagara St
Buffalo, NY 14213-1502
www.cacwny.org

