



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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ACHD Provides Additional Detail on Recent Mon Valley Air Quality Issues

PITTSBURGH – In order to better inform the public, Dr. Karen Hacker, Director of the Allegheny County Health Department, released the following information related to a December 24 fire at US Steel's Clairton Coke Works and air quality issues since that time:

"First off, this situation is not as simple as shutting down a restaurant that violates a local regulation. The layers of multiple state, local and federal regulations related to air quality are far more complex and create potential legal issues that could result in delayed mitigation efforts.

"Air Quality Program Managers were notified of the fire and the resulting damage on December 24th. We posted an [alert](#) on the ACHD Facebook page advising of the potential for air quality issues, and indicating that we had not yet seen any exceedance. In that verbal report from the plant, we were given a report on their mitigation efforts.

"When exceedances occurred on the 26th, the plant took additional steps to mitigate the problem and conveyed the same to our Air Quality Program. After subsequent exceedances on December 28th and in early January, ACHD officials and plant officials had in-depth conversations about additional mitigation steps and mandated weekly reporting.

"On January 8th, there were two more exceedances at which time the department took the step of issuing a formal public health [alert](#). There have been no exceedances since the mitigation efforts taken on January 8th.

"Based on ACHD conversations with the plant, US Steel indicated that there were several actions they could take to mitigate the impact. ACHD approved their mitigation measures and agreed to their implementation. To date, the following steps have been taken to address the breakdown:

1. Coke oven times were extended for multiple batteries and then extended further after subsequent exceedances
2. Natural gas was introduced to offset coke oven gas and use was expanded after subsequent exceedances
3. Flaring to dilute the impact of SO₂
4. Emergency plant modifications to support natural gas utilization and extended coking times

"We are prepared to issue orders to require additional mitigation efforts should progress be impeded. Full reports of the plant's mitigation efforts to date are available at <http://bit.ly/AQAlertMonValley>. We will continue to update this page with any additional reports. The public can also view hourly air quality data from the Liberty monitor (and all others) on the ACHD [website](#). The BREATHE PROJECT's Breathe Cams also provide live, and recorded, 24-hour camera feeds of the [Clairton Coke Works](#), and other facilities.

"In addition to regular communication, directives, plans and reports, our department is reviewing all possible enforcement options. The extent of the violation penalties can only be assessed after the incident concludes. Once the problem is fixed and the Health Department can evaluate this incident, the company faces civil penalties for permit and Article XXI Air Pollution Control violations.

“Yesterday’s public health alert was an unprecedented step by our department and is part of our efforts to provide more information on an ongoing basis to our residents. While the exceedances thus far have been short, they have also been unpredictable. Out of an abundance of caution, we issued the alert to ensure that the public was aware of the situation. Our mission and the responsibility of this department is to protect, first and foremost, the health of our residents.

“We will continue to provide information on additional actions and progress to repair the damage to the plant through updates on our Facebook page. Additionally, we will explore other ways to further improve our outreach efforts.”

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