



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Health Department Update on Clairton Coke Works Repairs and Air Quality in Mon Valley

PITTSBURGH – Health Department Director, Dr. Karen Hacker, issued the following update regarding repairs to the Clairton Coke Works and air quality in the Mon Valley:

"After receiving safety training, our inspectors and Air Quality Enforcement Manager have been allowed to see the damage at the Clairton Coke Works, and our inspectors are now monitoring repair progress daily. Our Deputy Director of Environmental Health and Air Quality Managers are receiving almost daily updates from US Steel. Right now, US Steel is continuing its mitigation efforts, and modifications to the plant are ongoing to reduce the impact of emissions. This includes extending coking times, introducing natural gas to offset coke oven gas, and flaring to dilute the impact of SO₂. We are prepared to issue orders to require additional mitigation efforts should progress be impeded.

"The damage to the building was severe, and at this time, US Steel has not determined the cause of fire and does not have a timetable for when repairs will be completed. US Steel is using an outside firm to conduct the investigation.

"The Health Department receives hourly updates on readings from the monitors throughout the county and is closely watching the ones impacted by the Clairton Coke Works. The latest SO₂ exceedance in the Mon Valley was measured at the Liberty monitor in the 4 a.m. hour on January 8, 2019. While there have not been any SO₂ exceedances since that time, plant repairs are ongoing, and there is still a risk for future exceedances. We have also received questions and concerns from the public about any impact to the North Braddock community, so information from the North Braddock air quality monitor is being included in ACHD's daily update posted on its Facebook page and issued via Allegheny Alerts.

"Out of an abundance of caution, we want the public to know that there remains a potential risk for future exceedances. We are continuing to encourage Mon Valley residents to be aware of this risk, especially sensitive populations, those with asthma, individuals with bronchitis or emphysema, children, and the elderly.

"SO₂ is a respiratory irritant which can make these conditions worse. We urge residents with these vulnerabilities to protect themselves by limiting their outdoor activities until repair is completed, given the risk of further exceedances. Anyone experiencing symptoms should see their primary care provider as soon as possible. In case of an emergency, dial 911 or go to the emergency room.

"We know that we need to do a better job of communicating information to impacted residents. To that end, we have been in contact with community advocates, elected officials and environmental groups with the most recent information and are working with all of them to reach Mon Valley residents.

"Until repairs are completed at the Clairton Coke Works, ACHD will provide daily updates at 3 p.m. related to information coming from the air quality monitors and a weekly update, such as this. Should there be any changes to information, or exceedances, information will be provided at that time. All updates will be posted on the ACHD [website](#) and [Facebook page](#). We have also begun to use the county's [Allegheny Alerts](#) system more proactively. Residents and interested parties can get notifications about a variety of information from the county. By

creating an account, individuals can choose how to be notified of information (text, phone call, email, etc.) and where (home, office, cell). Alerts related to this specific incident are being sent out to those individuals who register to receive general Health Department updates and air quality updates.

“ACHD remains committed to protecting the health and well-being of all residents. We also welcome input on communication efforts and encourage anyone experiencing health issues to report those to the Health Department at 412-687-ACHD (412-687-2243).”

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Karen Hacker, MD, MPH, Director

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