



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

ALWAYS INSPIRING

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 23, 2019

Contact: Ryan Scarpino
Public Health Information Officer
412-578-8312 (office)
412-339-7995 (cell)
Ryan.Scarpino@AlleghenyCounty.us

Hacker Weekly Update on Clairton Coke Works Repairs and Air Quality in Mon Valley

PITTSBURGH – Health Department Director Dr. Karen Hacker provided the following update regarding activity and other information from this past week relative to repairs at the Clairton Coke Works and air quality in the Mon Valley:

- There have been no SO₂ exceedances in the Mon Valley for the past two weeks. The last exceedance recorded was in the 4 a.m. hour on January 8, 2019.
- Health Department staff regularly monitor emergency room visit data for trends and other information, relative to a variety of health issues. We have been frequently monitoring such visits in the Mon Valley, particularly for asthma, since the December 24th fire at the Clairton Coke Works, but have not seen an uptick in those visits.
- U.S. Steel is still investigating the reasons behind the mechanical breakdown, but the company has reported that the fire started as a result of a failure in one of the compressors used for gas processing. Repairs are continuing. U.S. Steel advised yesterday that the coke oven gas cleaning unit is planned to be operating at 70% capacity by May 15, 2019, with the remainder to follow. The ongoing work includes repairs to piping, replacing damaged compressors, testing motors and structural repairs to the building.
- U.S. Steel is working with our asbestos staff on asbestos removal or encapsulation of pipe insulation due to the repairs to the piping network to bring the equipment back online.
- Mitigation efforts also continue. U.S. Steel has continued to extend coking times, use increased amounts of natural gas, and modified equipment to utilize the natural gas.
- The Health Department, along with U.S. Steel, will be placing additional SO₂ monitors in the area. Later this week, one will be placed at the Clairton Education Center. In the upcoming weeks, one additional monitor will be placed in an area near US Steel's Irvin Works, where coke oven gas is being flared. U.S. Steel is paying for these monitors. The information from the monitors will be added to the existing reports available on the Health Department websites and will be included in the daily reports as they come online.
- We have been asking U.S. Steel to also provide updates to the public regarding its mitigation strategies and a timeline for repairs to be completed. We were advised this week that a microsite has been set up for that purpose. It is available at: <http://www.clairton.uss.com>.
- The Health Department continues to post daily updates – a 3 p.m. posting – about the monitor data on SO₂ from the prior 24-hour period. Those updates are being posted on its [website](#) and [Facebook](#) as well as being sent to subscribers to [Allegheny Alerts](#). Those same mediums are being used for announcements on emergent issues, as well as these weekly updates. We have also started providing an update if there is projected poor air dispersion in the county for the following day.
- Our team has had several conversations with local, county and state elected officials about this issue, the progress to date, and future actions. The department participated in an informational session last night in Clairton with its elected officials and will also be participating in an upcoming hearing with Senators Costa and Brewster, and Representative Davis.

- Last week, we had the opportunity to provide feedback to the PA Department of Environmental Protection as well as to staff in the PA House of Representatives as to legislative action could be taken to provide additional tools and resources, including enforcement and monitoring capabilities, to the Health Department moving forward. We are hopeful that those conversations will result in legislation being introduced in the near future.
- We continue to review all possible enforcement options, and should any repair progress be impeded, we are prepared to issue orders to require additional mitigation efforts. Once the repair work is completed and the Health Department can evaluate this incident, US Steel faces civil penalties for permit and Article XXI Air Pollution Control violations.
- Finally, we ask that anyone experiencing health issues report those to the Health Department. We also welcome input on communication and other efforts related to this incident. Residents can call the department at 412-687-ACHD (412-687-2243), or submit information through the [online contact form](#) which will then be directed to the appropriate staff.

###

Karen Hacker, MD, MPH, Director

Allegheny County Health Department – Public Information Office

542 Fourth Avenue | Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone: 412-687-ACHD (2243) | Fax: 412-578-8325 | www.alleghenycounty.us/healthdepartment

Follow us: [allegheny alerts](#) | [facebook](#) | [instagram](#) | [linkedin](#) | [twitter](#) | [youtube](#)