



# ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Data from PM 2.5 Monitors in County Show Air Quality Improvements for 2018

**PITTSBURGH** – Significant changes to the Allegheny County Health Department’s (ACHD) operations, policies and procedures that have allowed the agency to be more aggressive in enforcement of the federal Clean Air Act appears to be having an impact. The department’s certified data shows that 2018 was the cleanest year to date for PM 2.5 at the Liberty monitor. All other PM 2.5 monitors in the county are in compliance.

“We are pleased that for the first time the PM 2.5 at the Liberty monitor has met the EPA standard. I congratulate and thank Dr. Hacker and her team for being vigilant when they saw violations occur in 2016,” said County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. “The department was more proactive, put more inspectors and environmental enforcement agents in place, instituted fines and took regulatory actions to improve the air quality in the Mon Valley.”

Each year, the Health Department certifies its data from the nine PM 2.5 monitors and sends it to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for quality assurance. The 2018 annual value for the Liberty monitor was 11.5 mg/cm. That value is lower than the EPA standard of 12 mg/cm and below the 2017 value of 13.4 mg/cm. Likewise, the 24-hour value for PM 2.5 was 28 mg/cm, lower than the EPA standards of 35 mg/cm and below the 2017 value of 36.5 mg/cm., which results in attainment of the EPA standard based on the last three years of data.

“We have worked diligently to address the issues at the Liberty monitor, and the 2018 data is showing that significant progress is being made,” said Dr. Karen Hacker, Director of the Health Department. “In addition to meteorological influences, we believe these improvements at the Liberty monitor are a result of strong enforcement actions, fines and penalties, and consequent improvements made at U.S. Steel’s Clairton Coke Works.”

From 2015-2017, the Health Department issued 33 violations and assessed fines of over \$2.5 million. Concerned that the violations and fines did not seem to be causing any behavior changes by polluters, the agency made a number of changes and took several actions:

- In late 2017, ACHD entered into a historic joint Notice of Violation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency against the US Steel Edgar Thompson plant for violations related to visible emissions and operation and maintenance violations.
- A new civil penalty policy, increasing fines to encourage deterrence, took effect January 1, 2018.
- Inspectors were assigned on-site at coke plants in the Mon Valley to quickly identify violations.
- The SO<sub>2</sub> state implementation plans were updated to require significant emission reductions, and work is currently underway to finalize the PM<sub>2.5</sub> plan to show attainment by EPA’s deadlines.
- The largest fines and enforcement actions in ACHD history were instituted in 2018 to the US Steel’s Clairton Coke Works - \$1.6 million; the June 2018 action also would compel a “hot idle” if emissions are not reduced after six months.
- The legal team was expanded and ACHD left behind negotiated consents orders, instead issuing direct enforcement orders and increased civil penalties.

In 2018 and 2019 to date, ACHD has issued 22 notice of violations and assessed fines of over \$3.4 million. Many of those have been appealed by the polluting companies. ACHD has continued to ask industry leaders, at both the local and regional levels, to help accelerate change. Additionally, the department has asked the legislature to provide additional tools and resources that would be helpful in improving the region's air quality.

"While these results are significant, there is still much to do to guarantee clean air for all. We must maintain vigilance and not allow U.S. Steel to back-slide," said Hacker. "Continued improvement is paramount. We will continue to be proactive and aggressive in our efforts to improve the air in Allegheny County and call upon industry to meet all requirements and curtail violations."

The three-year annual PM 2.5 design values are used by the EPA to establish compliance. The data from 2015-2017 was used by the American Lung Association in the State of the Air Report.

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