Appendix C – Press Releases, News Articles, Fact Sheets

2007 - Press Releases, Newspaper Articles

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Region 9, Press Release

For Release: IMMEDIATE
Tuesday, April 17, 2007

Contact: Meaghan Boice-Green
(716) 683-5959

DEC TO BEGIN TONAWANDA COMMUNITY AIR QUALITY STUDY
Community Groups Involved With Project

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced today that DEC has been awarded a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct air monitoring of hazardous air pollutants in the Town of Tonawanda, Erie County. EPA will provide $300,000 in grant funds, and DEC will spend an additional $300,000 to complete this study.

DEC Region 9 Director Abby M. Snyder said, "This project will provide a foundation for future air pollution studies across New York State. It also provides a model for community participation."

Traditionally, air pollution studies have focused on a few sites over a wide area. DEC and EPA are trying a new approach by focusing more effort on evaluating air quality in a smaller, industrial community, as well as by involving the local community in the study.

DEC has been collaborating with the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York (WNY) and the Town of Tonawanda Commission for Conservation and Environment to address concerns about hazardous air pollutants and odors in the Tonawanda community. In 2004 and 2005, the Clean Air Coalition of WNY and DEC collected and tested air samples for benzene, a hazardous pollutant emitted from local industries, automobiles and trucks. The testing indicated a need to collect additional data over a longer period of time to better understand the ambient (outdoor) air quality in Tonawanda.

DEC will measure hazardous air pollutants and fine particulate matter (PM) at four sites in Tonawanda for one year. Fine particles, those less than 2.5 microns in diameter, present potential health problems because they can penetrate into the deepest parts of the lungs. DEC intends to characterize air quality for air toxics and fine PM in the Tonawanda community on a micro scale level and use that information in collaboration with the community to evaluate possible air pollution reduction strategies. A final report will summarize the overall local air monitoring results, analyze the contributions of various air pollution sources in the community and include possible recommendations for community risk reduction strategies.

(MORE)

Clean Air Coalition of WNY Executive Director Jackie James said, “There are 53 permitted air polluters within 2 square miles in our Tonawanda community. This is the highest concentration of industrial air polluters within our state. We are concerned about the combined effect of all the air pollutants on our health and believe the pollutants emitted by Tonawanda’s industries may be the cause of higher than average illness in our community. We look forward to our continued research investigation with DEC and the University at Buffalo(UB).”

University at Buffalo Professor Joseph Gardella said, “This project is an exciting example of how DEC public participation can work best. The community sampling identified a potential long term problem, in an area with careful and fully documented oversight by DEC's Division of Air Resources. The cooperation with professional staff helped define needs for further data on emissions and exposure, and through the hard work of DEC staff, EPA funding was identified and granted, to support an exemplary study. UB resources will be developed to complement the air sampling with a special focus on air particulates. A great advantage is the well organized and active community leadership, such as the Clean Air Coalition, which has led efforts to gather and coordinate resources. I look for this effort to focus all community, university and government resources on the environment and health of Tonawanda community members.”

DEC met with the local community groups in Fall 2006 to discuss the study design in detail. DEC will continue to engage the local community in discussions by providing a progress report and preliminary findings at a second meeting in fall 2007. A third public meeting will be held when a final study report is available.

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Published: August 03, 2007 11:21 am

TOWN OF TONAWANDA: DEC study will determine if there are risks from plant emissions

By Daniel Pye / pyed@gnnewspaper.com
The Tonawanda News

TOWN OF TONAWANDA —There's something in the air in the Town of Tonawanda, and the Department of Environmental Conservation wants to know what it is.

Using a $300,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, the DEC has started a year-long air quality study in the town. Since July 1, air samples have been collected from four sites around the town to be analyzed to determine whether the heavy concentration of industrial polluters poses any health risks, according to environmental engineer Paul Sierzenga.

The sites were chosen according to EPA standards with an eye toward monitoring plants that could pose health risks for residents.

The machine that tests for particulate matter 2.5 microns or smaller, which is small enough to enter the lungs and do damage, runs 24 hours a day and sends data to the DEC headquarters every hour. Once things are properly set up, the data will be available on the DEC Web site, Sierzenga said.

This is a welcome look at a problem that could affect many town residents, said Martha Meyers, a member of the Clean Air Coalition.

"It's nice to see them get the monitors in," Meyers said. "I have asthma, so I want to see if pollutants are causing problems in general for people with breathing problems."

Another pair of machines collect air samples in sealed canisters once every six days, which are then sent to the EPA for analysis, Sierzenga said.

"They pull air from outside into the canister for a 24-hour period," Sierzenga said. "Collecting every six days gets us every day of the week and what's in the canister represents what was in the air at each site for the 24-hour period."

The final set of machines pull outside air through filters, capturing alcohols like formaldehyde that would stick to the sides of the canisters and not show up in the other analysis, Sierzenga said.

Samples have been collected every six days since the start of July, but the analysis still needs to be verified and more data collected before any sophisticated modeling can be done, said Tom Gentile, chief of the DEC's air toxins section.

"When we have a full quarter of data we can take a hard look at what we're seeing," Gentile said. "At that time in the fall, we'll have a meeting with residents to discuss the findings."

The study will make sure local plants are meeting EPA standards and see if the pollutants in the area are contributing to health risks, said DEC environmental engineer Al Carlacci.

"One of the specific goals of the grant is trying to verify the results of a DEC risk assessment," Carlacci said. "The focus is this industrial pocket, which is one of the heaviest industrial areas in the state or even the country when you look at it."

That layering of several polluters in one area makes each individual factory's compliance to federal regulations mean less when the emissions are all covering the same area, said Jackie James, head of the Clean Air Coalition.

"If there are four factories emitting benzene, they can all be within federal regulations," James said. "But combined, that still might not be enough. We're looking at what the community can do to make everyone happy and healthy."

While the EPA regulations are a start, if the data reveals a problem it would likely be up to the state to work with companies to get the emissions down in the short term, Gentile said.

“Right now, all the facilities are in compliance with federal regulations,” Gentile said. “Federal regulations are very rigid, whereas the state has the ability to tighten and adapt to changing things. I like to say all federal regulation has its genesis in good state programs.”

The Clean Air Coalition is still looking for volunteers to collect data that will augment the DEC study. Anyone interested can contact Jackie James at asireps@roadrunner.com.

Contact reporter Daniel Pye at 693-1000, ext. 158.

2008 - Press Releases, Newspaper Articles, Fact Sheets

TOWN OF TONAWANDA

Air quality sampling results to be reviewed

Updated: 02/29/08 6:47 AM

Analysis of air quality samples, collected in canisters and vials last year in the Town of Tonawanda, will be discussed at an informational meeting Saturday.

Sponsored by the state Department of Environmental Conservation's Division of Air Resources, the meeting is scheduled for 9:30 to 11 a.m. in Sheridan Parkside Community Center, 169 Sheridan Parkside Drive.

"The Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study will be a valuable tool in evaluating the impact of stationary and mobile source air emissions in the Tonawanda area," Abby Snyder, the DEC's regional director, said this week.

Last summer, the DEC installed four air quality monitoring stations around the Tonawanda area for what's to be a year-long study. The stations are on Grand Island Boulevard, near the NOCO terminal; Brookside Terrace Drive; Two Mile Creek Road, at the Sheridan Park water tower; and Beaver Island State Park golf course, which will provide background samples against which other readings will be compared.

Data on samples collected between July and December will be discussed Saturday.

The study continues air monitoring done in 2004 and 2005 to detect benzene downwind of the industrial area bordered by River Road, the Niagara Thruway and Youngmann Memorial Highway.

Information generated by the study will be shared with lawmakers, public health officials, and business and community groups toward local air pollution reduction strategies.

Also Saturday, the leader of a local environmental group will talk about a companion study to investigate the potential link between air pollutants and community health.

The Clean Air Coalition of Western New York received a grant from the DEC for that study, which will be carried out by volunteers wearing personal air monitoring badges, among other things.

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TOWN OF TONAWANDA: What's in the air?

Tonawanda has higher than recommended pollutant levels

By Caitlin Murray / murrayc@gnnewspaper.com
Greater Niagara Newspapers

Tonawanda News
http://tonawanda-news.com/

By Caitlin Murray - 3/2/08

murrayc@gnnewspaper.com

TOWN OF TONAWANDA — There's something in the air in Tonawanda: Benzene and 1, 3-butadiene emissions.

But the state's Department of Environmental Conservation is still figuring out exactly how much of the chemicals are in the air so officials will know how to reduce them.

A representative from the DEC shared with residents six-month results Saturday from its ongoing Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study.

The preliminary findings show higher than recommended levels of carcinogens benzene and 1,3-butadiene at all four data collection sites: Beaver Island State Park, Brookside Terrace Drive, the Sheridan Park Water Tower and Grand Island Boulevard.

While benzene levels are recommended at .13 micrograms per cubic meter, the Sheridan Park site had the lowest of the four at about 1.0. Grand Island Park Boulevard overwhelmingly had the highest at more than 11.0.

But the numbers for this area are not unique, said Garry Boynton, an environmental chemist for the DEC. Even at the top of White Face Mountain in Lake Placid, benzene levels are above guideline recommendations and Antarctica's levels are rising, too.

"Benzene is everywhere," Boynton said. "There's no where you can get away from it."

The chemical compound benzene is a carcinogen emitted from the production, burning and service stations of oil and gasoline. It also comes from tobacco smoke and some types of manufacturing plants.

The four sites were chosen, in part, to measure the wind patterns of the emissions at different points around the area.

The Tonawanda area was also found to have levels of 1,3-butadiene above recommended levels. All the sites, except for Grand Island Boulevard, were still under the statewide average, however.

There were some positive results, too. All four sites were well below the recommended levels for carbon disulfide.

The difference in the various chemical levels may be a direct result of the level of attention each emission has received from the DEC and government officials, said Thomas Gentile, chief of the air toxics section for the DEC.

"It seems like there's a way to go still with benzene," Gentile told the crowd of about 30 residents. "I showed you earlier the sort of success we've had reducing carbon disulfide and carbon monoxide. … That's been a 30-year effort to get some of these values down. We've worked on this (benzene) effort earlier than some other states, but we still have a long way to go."

Residents attending the presentation wanted answers.

“What is the end result of this study?” asked Tonawanda resident Ron Meegan, who lives near the Sheridan Park site. “When you say, ‘OK, the benzene level is (several) times higher than it should be,’ what does that mean to all of us living in this particular area?”

Gentile said residents should know that the DEC has heard their concerns and is examining the situation.

“What the study results do is give you information to work with us and work with the local government and local businesses to see what we can do to get reductions down to those guideline levels,” Gentile said.

Lifelong Tonawanda resident Thomas Rapp said he’s noticed chemical smells walking outside and came to the meeting to learn about what the odors mean for his family’s health.

“I didn’t take as much as I would’ve liked to from it,” he said of the presentation, “but it does reassure me that they’re doing something about this and at least there’s some effort going on here.”

Residents from Tonawanda were joined by Erie County Legislator Michele Iannello, D-Kenmore, and Jackie James, director of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York to hear the study’s preliminary findings.

The DEC will offer another public presentation to discuss the findings of the one-year study once it’s completed, Gentile said.

Buffalo Evening News

TOWN OF TONAWANDA
Tests find elevated air pollution
By Janice L. Habuda NEWS STAFF REPORTER
Updated: 03/06/08 6:58 AM

Air quality test results in the Town of Tonawanda aren't necessarily surprising, a state environmental expert and a local citizens group leader agreed.

When it comes to benzene, a carcinogen connected to industry, motor vehicle emissions and even tobacco smoke, they're as bad as expected.

"What's very concerning is that all of New York State is above that threshold limit," said Jackie James, executive director of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York. "Obviously, we are going to be concentrating our efforts on reducing benzene.

Testing by the state Department of Environmental Conservation continues through July at four sites in the town. It is part of a two-year effort to identify and address the risks posed by hazardous air pollutants.

Thomas Gentile, chief of the DEC's Air Toxics Section, briefed residents last weekend on the first six months' data. Informing the public is repeated in the two-year timeline, with another briefing expected after the year of sampling concludes.

"That's the primary goal of a study like this," Gentile said Tuesday. "You need to be informed, and you need to have good information to get people's attention."

Samples are being analyzed for 42 volatile organic compounds and 10 carbonyls. Fifteen of the chemicals are among 33 identified by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as urban air toxics that need to be reduced.

"The results that we are getting there are not unexpected," Gentile said of benzene readings.

As expected, benzene concentrations at a Grand Island Boulevard site are several times the state average. By way of explanation, Gentile cites several nearby industries and motor vehicle traffic.

Another site, near Brookside Terrace West, recorded the second- highest concentrations — roughly double the statewide average. Gentile noted that site is directly downwind from Grand Island Boulevard.

Other pollutants of concern are 1,3-butadiene — another carcinogen linked to motor vehicle exhausts and industrial production; and acrolein, an upper respiratory tract

irritant. Manmade sources of acrolein include tobacco smoke, and it is also formed when cooking fats are overheated.

Grand Island Boulevard also tops the six-month average for 1,3- butadiene concentration, at roughly double the statewide average. The three other sites fall below.

The Clean Air Coalition will study air quality at the personal level and is seeking volunteers to wear clip-on badges containing filters designed to absorb various chemicals.

The area of study includes the 14217 and 14150 ZIP codes. Volunteers cannot be cigarette smokers or professional cleaners and won't be allowed to pump gasoline while wearing a badge.

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Find this article at:
http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/northernsuburbs/story/292706.html

Funds sought to keep monitoring air

Published on July 16, 2008
Author: Janice L. Habuda - NEWS STAFF REPORTER
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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is being asked to continue funding an air monitoring program in the Town of Tonawanda that is set to expire at the end of this month.

The EPA provided a $300,000 grant under which the state Department of Environmental Conservation installed four air quality monitoring stations in July 2007. "The monitoring program [is] set to end about now -- in another week or so," said Daniel David, a regional DEC engineer.

Tuesday, Sen. Charles E. **Schumer**, D-N.Y., announced that he wrote a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson, urging the immediate release of money to continue the monitoring and the search for the sources of contamination.

Preliminary monitoring results, released in March, showed levels of benzene -- a carcinogen connected to industry and motor vehicle emissions -- that exceeded state levels at a Grand Island Boulevard monitoring site. That area, near the south Grand Island bridge, is host to gasoline distribution terminals, coke ovens, tire and sponge manufacturing and a coal-fired power plant.

Measured in micrograms per cubic meters of air, the Grand Island Boulevard location had a six-month average of more than 11; the statewide average in 2007 was 0.9.

The implications of such readings on public health couldn't be learned Tuesday, but part of the overall air quality study is to look at the effects of long-term exposure.

From the DEC's perspective, benzene level guidelines are used in issuing permits to industry. "It's not a standard, per se, but it's what we would recommend," David said.

Regarding the readings released in March, David said: "It's a level that raises some concerns but is not a violation of anything at this point. It's not necessarily a health concern."

Mary Mears, a spokeswoman for Region 2, which includes New York, said: "We agree it's an important project and . . at this point, haven't made any decisions to absolutely end the project."

The results of the year's readings will be discussed at a public meeting that likely will be held in September, the DEC engineer said.

The DEC is spending $300,000 for the second part of the two-year study. A final report will summarize the monitoring results, analyze the air pollution sources and include recommendations for reducing risk.

e-mail: jhabuda@buffnews.com

Published: October 15, 2008 12:40 am

TOWN OF TONAWANDA: Bucket activists work to collect air samples

By Daniel Pye
E-mail Dan
The Tonawanda News

While the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York's bucket brigade isn't stacking sand to fight a flood, they would argue the air samples their buckets collect could save lives.

The CAC has spearheaded several air monitoring projects in Tonawanda, and now is setting its sights on helping DuPont and Kaufman aveneue residents find out what is going into their lungs and where it's coming from.

In late July, homeowners on those roads began inexplicably waking up sick, and they believe nearby industrial plants are the cause. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and health department officials came to the houses to investigate complaints that foul odors and soot are the culprits, but have yet to make any concrete assertions. Work by the CAC using modified buckets to draw in air samples that could then be tested led the DEC to start taking a closer look last year, said CAC Director Jackie James.

"That data that we presented to the DEC got us our four air monitors," James said. "Because we stood up, said there's something wrong with our air and took samples."

The DEC installed monitoring in the town last July to examine the contents of the air at different times and on each day of the week. Early findings included a higher than normal level of the carcinogen benzene, and two of the four monitors were kept operational to collect more data. But those at the CAC meeting were worried the DEC posting its monitoring schedule on-line lets companies plan around the tests.

Mary Moore, one of the residents who complained in July, attended the CAC's Tuesday meeting and made several suggestions for documenting the negative effects of air pollutants, including having blood and urine tests done during or immediately after any illness.

"Our quality of life has been ruined by these plants," Moore said.

Moore and others said the worst of the odors occur at night and in the early morning. That's also when people are suddenly feeling nauseous and they worry that by the time the DEC is able to send someone to investigate, polluters have stopped releasing whatever made them sick. So the CAC assembled some concerned people to put monitoring tools into the hands of people who need them, said Co-director Adele Henderson.

"We're placing the three buckets strategically," Henderson said. "They'll be in the keeping of one person, but if there's an incident where you have to take a sample you have to call two other people in the group to do it together."

The process is strict, with participants expected to document the entire process with forms and photographs. At least two people have to be present for the event so there's a witness, and considering the usual hours the smells occur early morning wake-up calls are to be expected. With each sample analysis costing $500, things have to be handled carefully.

But taking air samples isn't the only way to get involved. The CAC handed out notebooks to the assembled group and asked them to document anything they think is out of the ordinary. Glen Ratajczak listed all of the things people should be recording for their letters to the DEC, including their location, air direction and speed, how long the incident occurs, any smells or tastes they encounter and what effects the incident has on their bodies.

"It's important to be very specific," Ratajczak said. "The biggest thing about documenting an episode is getting as much information as you can. Even things that you don't think are important might be."

Ratajczak's wife Jennifer echoed those sentiments, relating a recent trip to DEC headquarters where she found an empty folder for complaints relating to the area. To create a lasting record that gets the DEC's attention, she said it's important for residents to send letters documenting their personal experiences.

"I know some people are making calls and e-mailing, but that doesn't guarantee your complaint is recorded or kept," she said.

For more information or to participate in future CAC events, visit www.cacwny.org or e-mail jackie@cacwny.org.

Contact reporter Daniel Pye at 693-1000, ext. 158.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

FACT SHEET

Update on Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study

Division of Air Resources **November 2008**

INTRODUCTION

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) would like to update you on the status of the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study initiated in July 2007 to evaluate air pollutant concentrations in the industrial area of Tonawanda. Sampling at four air quality monitoring stations situated in this industrial area (see map on opposite page) concluded in July 2008. DEC will present the air monitoring results at a public meeting on **Tuesday November 18, 2008** at **7 PM** in the **Sheridan Parkside Community Center** (169 Sheridan Parkside Drive in the Town of Tonawanda) to discuss the findings and next steps, and to answer questions from the public. DEC is providing this fact sheet to update the community on the study's progress and to encourage public participation in developing strategies to reduce local sources of air pollution.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The section of Tonawanda that borders the Niagara River is one of the most heavily industrialized regions of Western New York. A number of industrial sites in the vicinity, including a coke plant and gasoline terminals, produce emissions which at certain levels may be harmful to human health and/or the environment. In response to citizen concerns about possible hazards and in order to identify the scope of the problem, DEC decided to study ambient (outdoor) air quality in more depth.

DEC applied for air study funding from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in August 2005 after sampling conducted by the Tonawanda Clean Air Coalition in 2004 and 2005, and later by DEC, showed elevated ambient air concentrations of certain pollutants. DEC won the grant in the amount of $300,000 and contributed its own money to fully fund the project.

In 2007, DEC installed four air monitoring stations placed strategically around the Tonawanda industrial zone. The sampling sites include a station at Grand Island Boulevard near the NOCO terminal, a station at the end of Brookside Terrace Drive, a station on Two Mile Creek Road at the Sheridan Park water tower, and an upwind station located at the Beaver Island State Park golf course. For a period of one year (July 2007 through July 2008) air samples were collected at these locations every 6 days for a 24 hour period.

NEXT STEPS

With the conclusion of the air monitoring in July 2008, DEC has completed 12 months of air monitoring, allowing us to calculate annual average ambient air concentrations and characterize the risk from specific air pollutants in the community. A public meeting will be held on Tuesday November 18, 2008 at 7PM in the Sheridan Parkside Community Center to discuss the air monitoring results. Members of the Clean Air Coalition will also be on hand to discuss their efforts to improve air quality and suggest ways for citizens to become involved.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY?

If you have any question about the project, please contact the following representatives:

Questions About Emission Sources

Mr. Larry Sitzman
NYSDEC
270 Michigan Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14203
(716) 851-7130
lbsitzma@gw.dec.state.ny.us

Questions About Tonawanda Study

Mr. Al Carlacci
NYSDEC
270 Michigan Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14203
(716) 851-7130
axcarlac@gw.dec.state.ny.us

Mr. Tom Gentile
NYSDEC
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233
(518) 402-8402
tjgentil@gw.dec.state.ny.us

DEC INVITES PUBLIC TO MEETING TO DISCUSS RESULTS OF TONAWANDA COMMUNITY AIR QUALITY STUDY

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Division of Air Resources will hold an informational public meeting about the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study on **Tuesday, Nov. 18, from 7 p.m. to approximately 9 p.m. at the Sheridan Parkside Community Center located at 169 Sheridan Parkside Drive in Tonawanda.** At the meeting, DEC will present the results of a year-long air monitoring study conducted from July 2007 to July 2008 in an industrialized area of Tonawanda. Anyone interested is welcome and encouraged to attend.

This meeting is the third informational public meeting to be held on the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study by DEC. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the air monitoring results and address questions from the public.

"The information gained from the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study will allow the DEC and its community partners to develop strategies to decrease air pollution in the Tonawanda area," said Regional Director Abby Snyder.

The Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study is funded through a $300,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with additional funding and staff support provided by DEC. DEC initiated the study in response to concerns about elevated air concentrations of benzene in the area downwind of the industrial area bordered by River Road, Interstate 90 and Interstate 290. Industrial facilities located in the study area include gasoline distribution terminals, coke ovens, tire manufacturers, sponge manufacturers, and a coal-fired power plant. The area also contains significant truck and automobile traffic, which are also contributing factors that need to been evaluated when assessing air quality.

As part of the study, four air quality monitoring stations were installed around the Tonawanda area. Air sampling at the stations began in July 2007 and concluded in July 2008. The air sampling sites included a station on Grand Island Boulevard near the NOCO terminal, a station at the end of Brookside Terrace Drive, a station on Two Mile Creek Road at the Sheridan Park Water Tower, and an upwind station located at the Beaver Island State Park golf course.

(MORE)

The data collected from the air quality monitoring study will be used for the following:

- Characterizing air quality in the community;
- Evaluating community exposures and characterizing risk;
- Assisting in developing a model ready inventory of emission sources;
- Evaluating air quality models and other risk assessment tools used by the DEC and EPA to predict community exposures to air pollutants;

- Evaluating EPA Coke Oven Residual Risk Assessment; and
- Evaluating our progress in reducing emissions of air toxics through numerous emission reduction efforts.

The information from this study will be shared with local government, state and local public health officials, community groups and business groups to continue discussions about the need for local air pollution reduction strategies for the community.

Members of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York will also be on hand to discuss their efforts to improve air quality and to encourage continued public participation.

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mailto:region9@gw.dec.state.ny.us. For more information on the upcoming meeting or the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study, please contact DEC's Region 9 Air Resources Division at (716) 851-7130.

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Published: November 19, 2008 01:21 am

TOWN OF TONAWANDA: DEC needs more time to study benzene data

By John J. Hopkins
The Tonawanda News

High levels of the carcinogen benzene indeed do exist in the air in Town of Tonawanda neighborhoods to the immediate east of River Road.

However, residents will have to wait until at least April to learn what the next step is in the process toward clearing the air around their homes.

That's what representatives from the state Department of Environmental Conservation's Buffalo and Albany offices told a crowd of about 75 during an informational meeting Tuesday at the Sheridan Parkside Community Center.

Data collected from four DEC-installed air monitors surrounding the neighborhood from July 2007 through July 2008 is still being analyzed. An inventory of data from "major" sources, such as industry, is complete, but inventory of data from area sources such as gas stations and mobile sources remains under review.

"There's a lot more work to be done on the data we've collected," said Tom Gentile, who heads the air toxins section of the DEC's Division of Air Resources in Albany. Gentile plans to provide another update to the public in April 2009. "If you don't have good emissions inventory, you're wasting time."

Benzene was one of six compounds for which the DEC provided test results, but was the only one that state officials determined had levels that were "of concern to the community."

Levels from monitoring stations at Beaver Island and the Sheridan Parkside water tower were just above the state's acceptable limits. The level was higher at the Brookside Terrace station, but very high levels were found at the Grand Island Boulevard monitor.

Data collected from Brookside indicates that 16 people out of 1 million could be expected to develop cancer from benzene. The DEC threshold used to determine whether action is necessary is one in 1 million. The state is much more stringent than the federal standard, 10 cases in 1 million.

Information at the Grand Island Boulevard site, located just west of the 290-190 interchange, is still being collected because Gentile said the "information there has been interesting."

DEC officials are reluctant to identify contributors to the high benzene levels.

Many in the audience were quick to point the finger at Tonawanda Coke, which they believe is also responsible for undesirable odors in the area. Tom Ryan said it was his understanding that Tonawanda Coke is part of a grandfather clause that exempts the company from tighter emissions standards. Gentile said that's not true, the company must still adhere to the federal Clean Air Act.

Larry Sitzman, a representative from the Buffalo office of the DEC, said he's visited Tonawanda Coke and is trying to determine the odor source within the plant. Overall, the company is in compliance with standards.

"They have self-regulators, but we still go out and inspect them," Sitzman said.

Answering another question, Gentile said odors are sometimes more intense at night because there is a "mixing zone" in the atmosphere that shuts down at night, allowing the odors to be more prominent.

Tonawanda Coke is just one of six area companies that generate benzene. The others are Indek Yerkes Energy Services, Goodyear-Dunlop, NOCO Energy Corp., NRG Huntley Electric Generators and Sunoco Tonawanda Terminal.

Add area gas stations, truck terminals and exhaust from vehicles to the list, and narrowing the culprit down to one contributor isn't easy.

“It’s hard to say who’s doing it,” Gentile said. “You don’t want to choose based on hearsay. You need a scientific basis to fortify your action.”

When the DEC hosts its meeting next April, Gentile said he hopes to be able to offer residents possible solutions. However, the strategy involved is complex. Gentile said he hopes residents will have an answer between 18 months to two years.

“I can’t promise overnight,” Gentile said. “Everything takes time.”

Tonawanda is not the only town in the United States where benzene is a problem. Gentile said there are 353 areas being monitored for benzene across the country, and not one is below the one in 1 million threshold.

Jackie James-Creedon, president of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York, said the information doesn’t appear encouraging in terms of enforcing tighter controls.

“Here we are in a community that’s upset with the information and there’s not a darn thing we can do about it,” James-Creedon said.

Gentile said that benzene levels do exceed state guidelines, and therefore there is room for improvement.

James-Creedon said her group hopes to use its “power of community organization” to ask local companies that produce benzene as a byproduct to be “good neighbors” and initiate their own tighter controls.

The coalition recently received a $40,000 grant that will fortify its efforts. James-Creedon said the coalition will announce its plans for the funding at 11 a.m. Friday at the Kenmore-Tonawanda Chamber of Commerce.

Gentile, who has worked with James-Creedon, praised the coalition for its work.

“Improvements happen when you get involved,” Gentile said, adding that community inaction promotes maintaining the status quo. “You have to be an environmental steward.”

Overall, DEC officials believe there is no reason for residents to believe that nearby industry is causing severe health problems. But they stressed the data still needs to be studied.

“I would say there’s no imminent threat right now,” Gentile said.

http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/story/498375.html
11/19/08

High benzene levels found in Tonawanda
Work in town seeks to reduce emissions
By Janice L. Habuda
BUFFALO NEWS STAFF REPORTER
Concentrations of benzene, a known carcinogen, exceeded state guidelines at Town of Tonawanda sites monitored during a yearlong study of air quality, residents learned Tuesday. The state Department of Environmental Conservation says it has a good idea what industries are contributing to those levels and continues to work toward reducing emissions of benzene and other toxins.

“There’s a lot more work to be done on the data we collected,” said Thomas Gentile, head of the DEC’s Air Toxics Section. He was among several DEC personnel at Tuesday’s public meeting in the Sheridan Parkside Community Center.

The Tonawanda study is part of the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s Ambient Air Toxics Monitoring Strategy. A final report will be presented to the EPA and local residents next spring, Gentile said.

From July 2007 to this July, air samples were collected at four monitoring sites. Sampling continues at two locations with the highest concentrations of toxins: Grand Island Boulevard and Brookside Terrace West.

The DEC bases regulatory decisions on annual guideline concentrations - a standard of .13 micrograms per cubic meter in the case of benzene. The year’s readings at the Grand Island Boulevard monitoring station averaged around 9.

“The good news . . . is that nobody’s living here,” Gentile said.

That particular monitoring station lies in the heart of the town’s in-

dustrial area, next to the heavily traveled Niagara Thruway and South Grand Island bridges. Motor vehicles also emit benzene.

In determining cancer risks - benzene has been linked to leukemia - most annual guideline concentrations are based on animal studies conducted during the two-year life span of laboratory animals.

For human exposure, such concentrations are considered unlikely to pose appreciable risk of harmful effects over a 70- year lifetime of constant exposure.

The cancer risk in the Town of Tonawanda is similar to that in Lackawanna and the New York City area.

Confused? So was Tuesday’s audience.

“Looking at the study, I am confused whether or not there’s a problem here,” one man said during the question-and-answer period. “Should I be concerned? Should I not be concerned?”

Gentile replied: “The [annual guideline concentrations] are tools to help guide decisions. We err on the side of caution. That’s why the [concentrations] are too low.”

“We probably need to get a focused benzene reduction program,” Gentile continued.

Another resident commented on smelly emissions in in neighborhoods abutting industry in the middle of the night.

Larry Sitzman, the DEC’s regional pollution control engineer, said the still night air causes a local buildup of contaminants.

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Group seeks meeting on benzene

By Janice L. Habuda NEWS STAFF REPORTER

A citizens group seeking to reduce benzene exposure in the Town of Tonawanda plans to start its mission by going directly to the source.

At a news conference Friday, members of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York announced they hope to meet with representatives of Tonawanda Coke Corp., whose River Road facility emits the most benzene of local industries.

“We want to sit down with them. We’re looking for them to be a good neighbor,” said Jackie James, the coalition’s executive director.

A representative of Tonawanda Coke could not be reached to comment Friday.

The coalition’s announcement came days after the state Department of Environmental Conservation met with residents to discuss results of a yearlong air quality study in the Town of Tonawanda. Several toxic substances were detected in varying concentrations, but it was the levels of benzene — a known carcinogen — that most alarmed residents.

Tonawanda Coke’s emission of 5 to 6 tons of benzene a year is equal to the emissions of motor vehicles traveling the busy corridor near the South Grand Island bridges, according to Al Carlacci, an environmental engineer with the DEC.

The air quality study determined that benzene readings at all four monitoring sites exceeded not only the state standard used for regulating industry but also the statewide average.

“What we are looking to do is reduce the overall threshold of air pollutants in the community,” James said. “The first thing we are going to target is benzene, because we have hard evidence of that.”

In addition, the coalition intends to use a $40,000 grant to educate the public about reducing their exposure.

“There’s actually a lot that people can do, too, to reduce benzene. If you’re reducing your carbon footprint, you’re also reducing your benzene footprint.”

Because of their exposure to the carcinogen, residents wonder whether multiple cases of cancer diagnosed in their families and neighbors are related.

“I am very concerned about the health of the residents in my district,” said Erie County Legislator Michele M. Iannello, D-Kenmore.

Iannello said she’s going to submit a resolution seeking the involvement of the Erie County Health Department.

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2009 - Press Releases, Newspaper Articles, Fact Sheets

Buffalo Evening News
3/5/09
Health study of Tonawanda residents sought
By Janice Habuda
News Staff Reporter

Erie County and state Health Department officials were on hand this morning to hear pleas for a health study of Tonawanda-area residents exposed daily to industrial air pollutants.

Neither made any promises; they're awaiting a final report from the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which concluded a year-long air quality study last fall.

Both appeared before a meeting of the county Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee, during which Legislators Michele M. Iannello, D-Kenmore, and Majority Leader Maria Whyte, D-Buffalo, asked for the health study for their constituents. A formal resolution is being composed for the Legislature's approval.

Air quality tests revealed excessive levels of benzene and formaldehyde - two known carcinogens ... in the neighborhoods near the Town of Tonawanda's industrial corridor.

"The final results should start to point closer to a source. There's a number of potential sources there," said Mark Kowalski, Erie County's assistant director of environmental health.

Ralph Van Houten, the state's environmental health director for the western region, similarly said: "Once we have that information, we will have a better understanding of what populations may be exposed to these chemicals."

That wasn't good enough for Iannello.

"The problem is that you're saying that we have to see the final results. I understand that ... I feel we need to take action now," she said.

"What I am asking for ... for you to work with the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York [CACWNY] because I've got sick residents. They've been sick for years," Iannello said.

It was the coalition, which began its own air testing several years ago to

investigate residents' illnesses, that prompted the DEC's year-long study. "It's absolutely essential that the Department of Health gets involved," Jackie James, its executive director, said this morning.

Jean Thomson, a resident of the Sheridan-Parkside neighborhood, told the committee about undiagnosable illnesses she's suffered during the past 30 years.

"There's got to be something that's wrong with me that can actually be proven," Thomson said. "If it's environmental, then something should be done about it."

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TOWN OF TONAWANDA: CAC group organizing members, awaiting results

By Daniel Pye
E-mail Dan
The Tonawanda News

For a third time, members and supporters of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York invited J.D. Crane, owner of the Town's Tonawanda Coke plant, to sit down and discuss his company's air emissions. For a third time, Crane refused.

So Tuesday evening, before an empty chair seated behind a name tag bearing Crane's name, members of the community told their stories to their neighbors and media cameras instead.

Those tales were varied, but all had an underlying theme of illness and despair over suspicions that those illnesses are related to living in a community the storytellers love. Life-long Ken-Ton resident Jackie James-Creedon, one of the group's executive directors, said her fibromyalgia diagnosis nine years ago left her asking questions about the cause. She quickly found plenty of people with similar serious issues, like Jeani Thompson, who also experienced fibromyalgia and five types of cancer to boot.

Others, like Jennifer Strickland, moved to the area more recently and are already feeling the results. After living in her Kaufman Avenue home for three years, Strickland said she, her children and her mother are all waking up with headaches and finding themselves prone to severe allergies.

"I try to spend most of my time away from my own home," Strickland said. "At this point, I wish I could move. I wish that was an option, but it's not."

Details of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's year-long air quality study have been trickling out since its completion in July 2008, with a final meeting scheduled for June 12 to present the complete picture. The data collected shows that benzene in certain areas — especially on Grand Island Boulevard in the town's industrial district — are up to 75 times higher than DEC recommended guidelines. That fact continued to baffle listeners Thursday, who were enraged that the guidelines for healthy air aren't laws which carry penalties.

In his lawyer's written responses to the CAC, Crane asserts his company is within the bounds set by law, and the company's self-reported numbers back up that claim. The fact that Tonawanda Coke's numbers for releasing benzene — a carcinogen — are kept by the company itself also raised the question of what prevents employees from lying at the meeting.

Dan David, regional environmental quality engineer for the DEC, said the agency tours the facility at least once a month, although since the number of complains began to spike last year the schedule has been more like once a week. DEC officials also accompanied federal Environmental Protection Agency inspectors on a recent tour of the plant, spending more than two days inspecting operations. And while David said coke production is a drawn-out process that's hard to alter or change on a moment's notice when the inspectors arrive at the door, he acknowledged that self-reporting can have its problems.

"There are some kinds of records, as with any type of business, that if someone wants to be dishonest they can get away with it for a period of time," David said. "But it would always catch up with them."

While the EPA report won't be out for more than a month, CAC members are hopeful that it will involve just that kind of catching up. Strickland said the smoke that settles in her yard from 5:30 a.m. until 9:30 a.m. and the soot it deposits on her home leaves little question in her mind that the emissions aren't safe, whether they're legal or not.

The City of Tonawanda, Town of Tonawanda and Erie County have all passed resolutions calling for the area's industrial polluters, and specifically Tonawanda Coke, to address their emissions. But local municipalities don't have the authority to impose restrictions, so CAC Community Organizer Colin O'Malley recommended other ways of getting results. Educating the people who buy Tonawanda Coke's products is one of those methods, appealing to the company's wallet instead of its conscience. Putting together other, more extreme actions like leading a protest at Crane's home or within his neighborhood were also discussed. While that kind of activity might seem impolite and make many uncomfortable, O'Malley said if the group isn't willing to make Crane and his company uncomfortable there won't be any incentive to change.

"We need to push. We need to agitate. We need to create some tension," O'Malley said.

Simultaneously, the group is still advocating for a legislative resolution. Erie County Legislator Michele Iannello said even though she can't make the law that tightens pollution restrictions, her office can help make the form letters and provide the addresses to citizens so they can bend the ears of state representatives. DEC complaint forms, which were handed out at the meeting, are another way people can make their voices heard.

Finally, the June 12 meeting will include representatives from both the DEC and the State Department of Health, who can take what they hear into the on-going discussions related to Tonawanda Coke's air permit, which is up for review and renewal this year. Charles Cobb, one of the CAC's core members, said getting the word out to the community is the only thing that can grow the group, fill its committees and get movement toward improvement.

“Talk to your neighbors, talk to your family members, talk at your churches,” Cobb said. “Talk, talk, talk.”

Contact reporter Daniel Pye at 693-1000, ext. 158.

For Release: IMMEDIATE
Friday, June 5, 2009

Contact: Mark Baetzhold
(716) 851-7220

DEC INVITES PUBLIC TO MEETING TO DISCUSS NEXT STEPS OF TONAWANDA COMMUNITY AIR QUALITY STUDY

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will hold an informational public meeting about the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study on **Friday, June 12, from 7 p.m. to approximately 9 p.m. at the Sheridan Parkside Community Center located at 169 Sheridan Parkside Drive in Tonawanda**. At the meeting, DEC will discuss plans to reduce the burdens of air toxics in the Tonawanda area. The public is encouraged to attend.

This meeting is the fourth informational public meeting held on the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study by DEC. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss analysis of the air monitoring results, recent inspection activities of facilities in the area, and on-going air quality monitoring conducted by DEC and to address questions from the public.

The Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study is funded through a $300,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with additional funding and staff support provided by DEC. DEC initiated the study in response to concerns about elevated air concentrations of benzene in the area downwind of the industrial area bordered by River Road, Interstate 190 and Interstate 290. Industrial facilities located in the study area include gasoline distribution terminals, coke manufacturing, tire manufacturers, sponge manufacturers, and a coal-fired power plant. The area contains significant truck and automobile traffic, which are also contributing factors that need to be evaluated when assessing air quality.

As part of the study, four air quality monitoring stations were installed around the Tonawanda area. Air sampling at the stations began in July 2007 and concluded in July 2008. The air sampling sites included a station on Grand Island Boulevard near the NOCO terminal, a station at the end of Brookside Terrace Drive, a station on Two Mile Creek Road at the Sheridan Park Water Tower, and an upwind station located at the Beaver Island State Park golf course.

The data collected from the air quality monitoring study will be used for the following:

- Evaluating community exposures and characterizing risk
- Evaluating air quality models and other risk assessment tools used by the DEC and EPA to predict community exposures to air pollutants
- Evaluating the results of the EPA Coke Oven Residual Risk Assessment
- Evaluating our progress in reducing emissions of air toxics through numerous emission reduction efforts.

The information from this study will be shared with local government, state and local public health officials, community groups and business groups to continue discussions about the need for local air pollution reduction strategies for the community.

Members of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York will also be on hand to discuss their efforts to improve air quality and to encourage continued public participation.

New York State Environmental Conservation

Update on Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study

Division of Air Resources **June 2009**

INTRODUCTION

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) would like to update you on the status of the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study initiated in July 2007 to evaluate air pollutant concentrations in the industrial area of Tonawanda. Sampling at four air quality monitoring stations situated in this industrial area (see map on opposite page) concluded in July 2008. Over the past year, DEC has been studying this data as well as data on wind direction. DEC also has conducted a number of facility inspections in the area.

DEC is providing this fact sheet to update the community on the study's progress and to encourage public participation in developing strategies to reduce local sources of air pollution.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The section of Tonawanda that borders the Niagara River is one of the most heavily industrialized regions of Western New York. A number of industrial sites in the vicinity, including a coke plant and gasoline terminals, produce emissions which at certain levels may be harmful to human health and/or the environment. In response to citizen concerns about possible hazards and in order to identify the scope of the problem, DEC decided to study ambient (outdoor) air quality in more depth.

DEC applied for air study funding from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in August 2005 after sampling conducted by the Tonawanda Clean Air Coalition in 2004 and 2005, and later by DEC, showed elevated ambient air concentrations of certain pollutants. DEC won the grant in the amount of $294,000 and contributed its own money and staff time to fully fund and conduct the study.

In 2007, DEC installed four air monitoring stations placed strategically around the Tonawanda industrial zone. The sampling sites include a station at Grand Island Boulevard near the NOCO terminal, a station at the end of Brookside Terrace Drive, a station on Two Mile Creek Road at the Sheridan Park water tower, and an upwind station located at the Beaver Island State Park golf course. For a period of one year (July 2007 through July 2008) air samples were collected at these locations every 6 days for a 24 hour period.

The year-long air monitoring allowed DEC to calculate annual average ambient air concentrations, characterize the risk from specific air pollutants in the community, and evaluate the data with wind direction information.

NEXT STEPS

DEC will continue compliance inspections of the many air pollution sources in the area. The department is continuing to gather and investigate complaint information in the community. In addition, two air monitoring sites (Grand Island Blvd. and Brookside Terrace) are continuing to collect data.

The results of these inspections and the monitoring results will be used to make decisions about revising current NY State regulations that govern certain air pollution sources and requiring a greater degree of air pollution control at specific sources using current NY State regulations. DEC will continue to provide study information to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), which will determine the feasibility of conducting a community health study. Finally, DEC will continue our dialog with the community and industry representatives to evaluate the achievement of our goals to improve air quality for the community.

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AIR QUALITY STUDY?

If you have any question about the project, please contact the following representatives:

Questions About Emission Sources Study

Mr. Larry Sitzman
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OR

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Questions About Tonawanda Study

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Tonawanda Coke plant at fault for foul air, DEC study concludes

By Harold McNeil NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda residents have long suspected that cancer-causing benzene emitted from the Tonawanda Coke plant was behind the bad smells and illnesses they have been experiencing, and the conclusions of an air quality study would seem to support their contention.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation held an informational meeting Friday to share the analysis of the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study with about 200 residents in the Sheridan Parkside Community Center auditorium.

Among the conclusions shared by Thomas Gentile, head of the DEC's Air Toxics Section, was that the Tonawanda Coke plant on River Road has been the likely source of the irritations to the eyes, ears, noses and throats of nearby residents.

For Jackie James-Creedon, director of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York, it was a long-awaited vindication.

"For a government agency to actually say the culprit is one specific company, that was like, finally, because we knew that," said James-Creedon.

"We suspected that all along because of benzene emissions and just by our residents seeing all of the smoke and getting sick because of all of that smoke coming from Tonawanda Coke," she added.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, long-term exposure to benzene causes harmful effects on the bone marrow and can cause a decrease in red blood cells, leading to anemia. It can also cause excessive bleeding and can affect the immune system, increasing the chance for infection.

The study, funded through a $300,000 grant from the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, involved the collection of wind and meteorological data, as well as the monitoring of pollution concentrations at four monitoring stations: Beaver Island State Park, the Brookside Terrace neighborhood in the town, Grand Island Boulevard off of the Niagara Thruway, and the Sheridan Drive Water Tower.

The monitoring took place between July 2007 and July 2008. Five hazardous chemical compounds were measured, with the most volatile being benzene, which the study found in concentrations that greatly exceed the state average, particularly at the Grand Island monitoring station.

“We knew that our air stunk. We know the people are getting sick. However, we have so many industries here. Let’s face it, it’s the combination of all of them, but we have to draw the line somewhere. And we had to draw the line at the worst culprit,” said James-Creedon.

Friday’s meeting was the third in a series of meetings that the DEC has held with residents. Representatives from the EPA also attended the meeting.

Larry Sitzman, the DEC’s regional pollution control engineer, said the goal, after all the data from the study is analyzed, is to reduce odor complaints and the emission of chemicals that are associated with the illnesses and irritations that residents in the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda area have been complaining about.

“The job is a long way from being done,” said Sitzman.

He added that air sampling will continue at both the Grand Island Boulevard and Brookside Terrace sites, and he promised continuous inspections at the larger plants in the area, such as the Huntley Power Station and NOCO.

Meanwhile, James-Creedon and members of the Clean Air Coalition sought a commitment from the DEC that there will be more resident involvement in any remediation.

“We want to have a say in how our air pollution is reduced and by what limit it should be reduced to, by what concentration,” said James- Creedon.

The group also wants the DEC to enforce tighter controls on the permits of polluters.

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Buffalo Evening News

ENVIRONMENT

Tonawanda Coke urged to cut benzene emissions

WASHINGTON—Sen. Charles E. Schumer is pressing the owner and CEO of the Tonawanda Coke Corp. to reduce the release of harmful benzene emissions from the Tonawanda plant.

Noting that government data confirms that Tonawanda Coke is responsible for releasing tons of toxic chemical compounds into the air, Schumer said the company needs to act to reduce benzene levels that are up to 75 times higher than the state Department of Environmental Conservation recommends.

“I have long championed manufacturing in Western New York, and I value Tonawanda Coke’s importance as an employer in the region, but with the health and safety of Tonawanda residents at risk, now is the time to ramp up efforts to reduce these emissions,” Schumer wrote in a letter to J. D. Crane, the owner and CEO of the company.