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Residents Urge U.S. Steel to Focus on Cleanup

Pittsburgh, PA – Residents in the Mon Valley and Pittsburgh urged U.S. Steel to stop appealing fines for air pollution violations and focus on fixing the long violating Clairton Coke Works. The Allegheny County Health Department held a hearing today on U.S. Steel’s appeal of ACHD’s \$1,000,000 fine for hundreds of recent violations at the Clairton Coke Works.

“Residents in the Mon Valley have long suffered from years of poor air quality caused by U.S. Steel’s violations. It’s time for U.S. Steel to invest in our health and jobs in the Mon Valley instead investing in their high-priced lawyers,” said Clairton resident Miriam Maletta.

“I’m glad to see that our Health Department is taking action against U.S. Steel for these violations, but when are we going to see U.S. Steel focus on cleaning up their plants? Pittsburgh residents should not have poor air quality because of one company thinking they are above the law,” said Clairton resident Melanie Meade.

Air quality scientists at Carnegie Mellon University have conducted detailed studies of air quality in Allegheny County, finding that U.S. Steel’s Mon Valley plants are significantly impacting air quality in over half the county, including in Pittsburgh’s East End. The Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) ranks areas downwind of the Clairton Coke Works in the top 2% nationally for cancer risk from toxic air pollution.

Geoff Bland, a community organizer with Clean Water Action stated, “U.S. Steel has been given many years to fix their plant, and still they put out illegal levels of pollution that can make people sick. If U.S. Steel wants to be a good neighbor in Allegheny County, they need to show us they can run this plant in compliance with the law.”

“U.S. Steel has treated Pittsburgh’s skies as its dumping ground for decades, filling our lungs with chemicals that can cause cancer and asthma. It’s past time for the company to face serious consequences for their long history of disregard for the health of the city that built them,” said Zachary Barber, the Clean Air Advocate with PennEnvironment Research and Policy Center.

In June 2018, ACHD issued an enforcement order against U.S. Steel for multiple and repeated violations of the Clean Air Act, including increasing emissions violations and active attempts of U.S. Steel employees to disrupt official inspection. The order came with \$1M in fines, orders for more rigorous monitoring and a 60-day deadline to improve compliance or face a temporary freeze on operations of the dirtiest parts of the plant.

“U.S. Steel’s illegal pollution poses a real risk to the thousands of people who live within 3 miles of the plant and the many more who live in the path of the company’s toxic plume,” said Kelly Yagatich, Outreach Coordinator for the Clean Air Council.

This is not the only time the coke works has been cited for breaking the law. A separate enforcement action in October 2018 brought \$620,000 in fines for further increases in the number of violations. The Health Department also cited the facility for an average of more than 3 violations per day for a period of 4 years starting in 2011.

“U.S. Steel has been given years to fix the problem, but chose to continue breaking the law,” said Rachel Filippini, Executive Director of the Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP).

As one of the largest regional polluters, the Clairton Coke Works has long been the subject of public outcry. The facility ranked #3 on PennEnvironment’s Toxic Ten ranking of the dirtiest polluters in the county and was the subject of lawsuits by PennFuture and others.

“A \$1 million dollar fine might sound like a lot, but it really represents only 8 one thousandth of a percent US Steel’s \$12.2 billion in revenue last year, said Matt Mehalik of the Breathe Project. “This would be like fining the average Pittsburgh family \$6.09. The fact that U.S. Steel is appealing this enforcement action instead of fixing the problem is disappointing.”

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