



**January 23, 2019**

**PRESS CONFERENCE**

Contact: Debra Smit, 412-760-7677  
dsmit@breatheproject.org

**Clairton Residents Speak Out Against U.S. Steel’s Failed Response on  
Clairton Coke Works Pollution**

(January 22, 2019) – Residents from eight communities surrounding the Clairton Coke Works and environmental advocates will gather to share the concerns of the community regarding the Christmas Eve 2018 explosion and fire at U.S. Steel’s Clairton Coke Works. The event destroyed the plant’s ability to remove oils and sulfur emissions from the still-operating coke ovens, creating serious ongoing public health concerns.

Mon Valley residents will be available to speak to the press. The press event will take place:

**Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019 at 3 p.m.  
Community Economic Development Corporation Center  
282 St Clair Avenue  
Clairton, PA 15025**

One month following the serious explosion and fire at 4:00 a.m. on Dec. 24, Mon Valley residents have received little meaningful information other than being told to stay indoors for an indefinite period of time while the plant continues to operate. As a result of the accident, the region’s largest polluting facility is operating without desulfurization pollution control equipment indefinitely and in violation of their Title V operating permit. There have been at least six events where sulfur dioxide levels exceeded air quality standards – in one case with emissions being nearly double the legal limit, on December 28, 2018.

The incident at the Clairton Plant has resulted in an ongoing public health risk prompting Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) to issue air quality alerts for people in the Mon Valley region, initially, and currently for all of Allegheny County. The original alert was issued two weeks after the explosion and after all six exceedances of air quality standards had already occurred.

In the past week, evidence of exacerbated asthma and respiratory distress in children in the Clairton School District has elevated concern in the community – a situation that has yet to be addressed by U.S. Steel or by Allegheny County leadership. Weather conditions favorable for temperature inversions – resulting in trapped air pollution over communities – prompted an ACHD alert on January 18, 2019, for all of Allegheny County.

“Because of this lack of leadership, Mon Valley residents have been relegated to demanding protection for themselves as well as accountability for the failures of equipment as well as a plan for protection from ongoing pollution,” said Matthew Mehalik, Breathe Project executive director.

Among other key points, residents will be calling for:

- The Allegheny County Health Department should order the U.S. Steel Coke works to be placed in hot idle until pollution control equipment can be brought back on line. ACHD has this authority to act because of the unique nature of the air quality advisory itself. The order, which was issued “until further notice,” indicates the serious nature of the public health threat because of the unpredictability of air quality violations that may occur and because of evidence of increasing respiratory issues surfacing in the community.
- The Allegheny County Health Department and County Executive Rich Fitzgerald should honor their first responsibility – to protect the health and safety of county residents. ACHD must advocate for the public and protect them when industrial events occur.
- U.S. Steel should take responsibility for this disaster and inform the public on a regular basis regarding the ongoing work to correct the damage. To date there has been little, if any, communication from U.S. Steel, the source of the ongoing threat to public health due to uncontrolled emissions. They should also put the plant in hot idle until all pollution control equipment is brought back online in accordance with legal requirements in their Title V permit.
- There are questions about how this incident has been managed by county leadership and ACHD, prompting further questions about whether there should be an investigation.

Residents of Clairton and the Mon Valley have issued the following statements:

“People in my community are tired mentally, physically and spiritually of the health impacts of this plant,” said Melanie Meade, a life-long resident and mother in Clairton. “U.S. Steel is not following the law. Clairton is the Love Canal of Pennsylvania.”

“People in Clairton have had ear and sinus problems for weeks that started around this time,” said Cheryl Hurt, a life-long resident who runs a daycare for children in Clairton. “How would U.S. Steel feel if they lived here and weren’t informed about this situation? The children and the elderly were not taken into consideration.”

“The odors from the plant have been more noxious than ever. Last week, it was so bad that I thought something in my house was burning,” said Michael Meighan of East Pittsburgh, who has lived in the Mon Valley for 15 years. “It seems that fines are not enough to convince U.S. Steel’s Clairton Coke Works to make the necessary repairs. The Allegheny County Health Department should force them to hot idle until the problem has been fixed.”

“I fear that health protections are not rising as the top priority for those of us who live in the affected communities,” said Lisa Graves-Marcucci, speaking on behalf of herself and her family in West Mifflin, Pleasant Hills and Jefferson Hills, all life-long residents of the Mon Valley. “More must be done to hold U.S. Steel accountable for the serious pollution releases and that accountability must focus on health and not the company’s bottom line.”

“It took 16 days and 6 air quality violations before the Allegheny County Health Department issued a public health alert warning vulnerable residents of 22 Mon Valley communities to stay indoors,” said Ned Ketyer, M.D., an area pediatrician and member of American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Environmental Health. “With air quality warnings still in place for residents, regional health care providers are still waiting for information and guidance from the county health department. As a result, Mon Valley residents continue to be abused and children continue to be hurt by Clairton’s toxic neighbor.”

“The health department’s mission is to protect, promote and preserve the health and well-being of all Allegheny County residents, particularly the most vulnerable,” said Rachel Filippini, executive director of GASP. “They should be requiring U.S. Steel to do everything necessary to prevent emissions that we know negatively impact community health.”

“US Steel’s legacy as a Toxic Neighbor to the Clairton community continues unabated, as evidenced by this egregious incident,” said Jacqui Bonomo, president and CEO of PennFuture which launched the #ToxicNeighbor campaign in the fall of 2017 to call out industrial polluters in our region. “We are calling on US Steel to come out from behind the shadows of Clairton Coke Works, own its legacy and the harm it is causing to our communities, and begin the hard work of cleaning up this filthy facility. The suffering of this community and its children must stop now.”

"Every day that this plant continues to run without critical pollution control is a day that Allegheny County chooses to side with illegal polluters over the health of our families," said Zachary Barber of PennEnvironment. "County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and the Health Department prioritize our well-being- and that starts with closing Clairton Coke Works until we can be sure there will be no more illegal pollution."

Several elected officials will join the gathering including Controller Chelsa Wagner and Rep. Summer Lee (D-Braddock).

Resources relating to this incident are available on Clean Air Council's Coke Oven website at <http://pacokeovens.org/news/>.