

July 14, 2020

Remarks for Public Comment

ACHD Board of Health Meeting
542 Fourth Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Thank you for allowing me to comment today.

Any new administration requires time to come up to speed so that an organization has a chance to re-align its priorities to new leadership. Inevitably, there are adjustments to new ways of doing things that emerge from changes to organizational culture reflecting the values that the new leader elevates.

While these adjustments are underway, the world keeps spinning. In more concrete terms, this means pollution events keep happening in our community. Since the last BOH meeting on May 13, 2020, air in our county has appeared in the EPA's Top-5, worst-air-in-the-country rankings 25 times out of 62 days, or 40% of the time. Air in our region has been #1 worst on this list 7 times, a little more than once every 10 days.

Since the beginning on June, when US Steel re-started the No. 1 blast furnace at Edgar Thomson, we have documented:

- An eruption of a massive reddish emission cloud from Edgar Thomson on June 17, 2020.¹
- Ongoing emissions of heavy black smoke from Edgar Thomson multiple times on June 23 and 25, 2020.²
- An apparent large fire lasting over an hour at Edgar Thomson on July 4, 2020, followed by the Lincoln monitor in the red for several hours.³
- An exceedance of the ozone standard on July 7 and 8, 2020.
- Over 2280 bad smell reports.

In the midst of these incidents US Steel released its Sustainability Report, which states on p. 4, "In all our efforts we ask ourselves what Judge Elbert Gary [a US Steel founder] asked — "Is it right?" — because we know that we must operate as a principled company."⁴

All of the incidents have been communicated to ACHD. ACHD communicated it would look into the red cloud incident. But we have not heard anything subsequently about that incident nor any of the others. In fact, a planned meeting on air quality topics was cancelled in the midst of these incidents.

¹ https://twitter.com/inversion_doc/status/1273622970116853761?s=20

² <https://bit.ly/2V9mdin>; <https://bit.ly/2BumZjb>; <https://bit.ly/31c1bDW>; <https://bit.ly/2NnVDOP>; <https://t.co/PNCCBXaMQq>

³ <https://twitter.com/BreatheProject/status/1279433214013169664?s=20>;
<https://twitter.com/BreatheProject/status/1279433717979758592?s=20>;
<https://twitter.com/BreatheProject/status/1279444910861627394?s=20>

⁴ https://ussteel.com/sites/default/files/U.%20S.%20Steel%202019%20Sustainability%20Report_web.pdf

As the leadership transition progresses, we are asking ACHD to improve dialog with community members, especially environmental justice communities, to convey ACHD's commitment to air quality improvement as a top priority. We are also asking ACHD to improve its community alerts about ongoing, frequent bad air episodes so that community members can protect themselves more effectively from pollution. Please hold polluting entities accountable. Please stop these frequent incidents.

There is consensus and clear communication from the country's top public health analysts and officials stating that reducing air pollution in the midst of a SARS-CoV-2, which is known to cause tissue inflammation and organ damage, should be a top priority. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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