

Getting tough on polluters



THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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For decades the Pittsburgh region, especially the Mon Valley, has suffered from substandard air quality. This has led to a range of public health problems, including elevated rates of asthma. So it is encouraging to see the Allegheny County Health Department implementing a new rule for industrial polluters.

In February, the department rejected air quality plans submitted by six industrial plants in the Mon Valley; meantime, it approved the plans of 10 other facilities. A new rule, passed by County Council, and signed into law last fall, required the 16 plants to describe how they would reduce emissions on days when the area is under an air quality watch or warning. The department found the six plans unacceptable and sent them back for revisions.

Those submitting inadequate plans were Clairton Slag, ELG Metals, U.S. Steel Edgar Thomson Plant, TMS West Mifflin, U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Works, and TMS Edgar Thomson. The department gave them 30 days to improve their plans or face a fine of \$25,000 per day, per violation.

We applaud the department's tough stance with the six plants. Of course, a plan is only words. Action by the companies will have to follow. The Health Department will need to remain vigilant in monitoring compliance after the revised documents are submitted.

Some air quality experts feel that the Mon Valley Air Pollution Episode Rule doesn't go far enough. It addresses pollution only on days when

weather conditions create dangers for people with respiratory problems. What about the other days when the industrial facilities continue to pour out toxins and particulates?

The long-term solution is for these companies to upgrade their equipment to eliminate much of the pollution they produce. U.S. Steel announced such a rebuild of its Edgar Thomson plant in 2019, only to rescind that plan later. Knowing that public health is at risk, all stakeholders, including board members of corporations, should be looking for ways to make these upgrades possible.

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