



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact:

Debra Smit, Breathe Project

[dsmit@breatheproject.org](mailto:dsmit@breatheproject.org). 412-760-7677

**Broken Promises: Allegheny County Residents, Advocates Call on ACHD to Enforce  
Clean Air Act Regulations and Stop Ongoing Pollution Episodes**

**PITTSBURGH** – For a second year in a row, Allegheny County residents were forced to breathe some of the worst air in the country. For seven straight days, Dec. 21 to Dec. 26, Allegheny County air quality ranked in the top five worst in the country according to the EPA’s AirNow.gov.

The air quality readings by monitors in the Mon Valley also had a signature of coke making emissions, raising concerns once again about possible pollution from the U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Works. The emissions impact was amplified by a weather system that trapped pollution on top of our region.

The violations of the particulate and hydrogen sulfide standard meant that Allegheny County’s air was not compliant with the federal Clean Air Act. Our ongoing horrific air quality problem will once again be the focus of a press conference and rally on **Friday, Jan. 10, 2020 at 11 a.m. at the City County Building, 414 Grant St. in Pittsburgh.**

Residents and environmental groups demand that Allegheny County Health Dept. (ACHD) hold U.S. Steel accountable for ongoing pollution due to poor facility maintenance and update county regulations to curtail coke oven emissions so facilities that pollute during temperature inversion events are forced to shut down or limit production.

The county health department first considered establishing procedures to stem industrial pollution in 1975 when 14 deaths were attributed to pollution during a weather inversion – long before climate change was in the daily lexicon according to GASP. GASP addressed these concerns in 1975 and recently in a [blog](#) calling for tighter coke oven regulations. The impact of the Donora event are also well documented.

Broken promises on investments and repairs by U.S. Steel and failed promises by ACHD to hold U.S. Steel accountable have brought us to this point. The details of the recent violations were:

- For 7 days in a row, Dec. 21 – Dec. 26, the Liberty air monitor exceeded the 0.005 ppm 24-hour hydrogen sulfide standard.
- Preliminary data from the ACHD showed an exceedance of the 24-hour average PM2.5 National Air Quality Ambient Standards (NAAQS) limit on Dec. 21, Dec. 22, Dec. 23, Dec. 24 and Dec. 25 and Dec. 26.
- Dec. 25 also marked seven days in a row that the Liberty monitor exceeded the 0.005 ppm 24-hour hydrogen sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) standard.

“Being a mother and a 14-year resident of Clairton means having to breathe this toxic air that hovers over our city,” said Germaine Gooden-Patterson, Clairton resident. “It means being awakened by the smell of pollution, and having my youngest daughter with cold symptoms for over a month. This should not be our norm! Let’s stop robbing people of their Humanity! Every Human has a God given right to breath healthy air.”

"In my work educating youth from environmental justice communities throughout Allegheny County on climate change, the most common concern they voice is poor air quality and how it impacts their personal health and the health of their loved ones," says Katie Modic, Coordinator of Educational Initiatives, Communitopia.

"ACHD needs to act quickly to establish a comprehensive plan to address what is essentially a two-fold problem," said GASP Executive Director Rachel Filippini. "First, the department must put a procedure in place to protect public health when inclement weather combines with industrial air pollution to tank local air quality, as it did over the Christmas holiday. Second, ACHD needs to live up to a promise it made more than a year ago to revise and strengthen coke-oven regulations to combat exceedances of air pollutants like hydrogen sulfide every day."

“It is clear that whatever steps U.S. Steel has taken to try to fix the Clairton Coke Works have failed,” stated Myron Arnowitz, Pennsylvania Director for Clean Water Action. “No company should be allowed to make their neighbors sick. We need leadership in Allegheny County who will get pollution reductions from U.S. Steel that the company to date has been unable, or unwilling, to make. Our kids’ lungs and our parents’ hearts deserve to have clean air.”

"It's disingenuous to blame the weather for the Pittsburgh region's horrendous air quality. Extreme inversion events wouldn't be as life-threatening if they didn't contain industrial pollutants coming from plants like Clairton Coke Works," said Kelsey Krepps, Western Pennsylvania Outreach Coordinator, PennFuture. "With inversions happening more frequently, U.S. Steel needs to invest in innovative, newer technology to prevent people from getting sick."

The rally will be followed by the Board of Health meeting at 12:30 at the Allegheny County Health Department's administrative offices at 542 Fourth Avenue, Pittsburgh. Many residents all plan to speak at the public meeting, although the health department has informed them they will go last after the meeting agenda.

### **Rally Speakers**

Art Thomas – Clairton resident

Howard Rieger – Squirrel Hill resident

Leandra Mira – Fridays for our Future and climate change youth activist

Dr. Deborah Gentile, pediatrician

Mark Dixon – Pittsburgh documentary filmmaker and air quality activist (Blue Lens)

Thaddeus Popovich – Allegheny County Clean Air Now (ACCAN)

Katie Modic – Coordinator of Educational Initiatives, Communitopia

Rachel Filippini – Executive Director of GASP

Myron Arnowitt – Executive Director of Clean Water Action

Zach Barber – Outreach for PennEnvironment

Jay Walker – Outreach for Clean Air Council

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