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Remarks for Public Comment

Allegheny County Health Department
Air Quality Program
301 39th Street, Bldg. 7
Pittsburgh, PA 15201-1811

Submitted via email to: aqcomments@alleghenycounty.us

Ref: Title V permits for United States Steel Corporation, Edgar Thomson Works (0051-OP22), Magnus Products, LLC. (0265-OP22), and TMS International, LLC. (0225-OP22).

Dear ACHD Board of Health Members and Staff:

Thank you for holding this hearing. In Allegheny County, we should feel confident knowing that the air we breathe will not make us sick or cause cancer, asthma, or other diseases. We have the right to live and work in clean, safe-and healthy environments.

This hearing is about Title V permits involving Edgar Thomson. For those of us who just marched across this historic town of Braddock, a place that contains the history of the bulk of own my known ancestry, it is apparent that this place has experienced repeated, severe, and ongoing trauma. We must begin by acknowledging trauma as the context and backdrop to this entire proceeding.

On this very ground there has been:

- Trauma from the clashes of European and Native American cultures that spawned a world war involving goals of colonialism and resource exploitation. This site is a historic battlefield.
- Trauma from the exploitation of an abundant endowment of natural resources- land, water, minerals, fossil fuels.
- Trauma from the exploitation of labor; conflicts involving workers pursuing economic basic security amidst severe pollution and risks to life and health.
- Trauma from the disruption of families in the form of early deaths and high rates of accidents, heart attacks, lung diseases, cancer.
- Trauma from a toxic legacy of the pitting against one another of workers versus community members, people of different countries of origin, historical cultural, racial, and ethnic identities, religions, and castes, and tribal psychologies.
- Trauma from resulting systemic discrimination that produces inequities in investments and access to educational resources, healthcare, hospitals, and quality housing.

- Trauma from the constant back-and-forth of promising of changes and investment that do not materialize – only threats of job losses that induce fear.
- Trauma from political and professional exploitation of the community’s identity for the sake of opportunism.
- And, of course, trauma from high levels of air pollution; rotten-egg smells, metallic smells, and dust that leave residents gasping for relief overnight, in the morning hours, and at random times during the day.

Take a moment to reflect on the thousands of people who have been and who currently are affected by these traumas. Visit the cemeteries in the hills surrounding the community and read the dates on the tombstones. Reflect on your own role and why you are here. Are you here to begin a process of healing, together? Are you here to find the path that leads towards health of this community, its workers, and its future?

[Pause]

People here have the power to come together to change this legacy – over 250 years of it. Step 1 can be to issue permits that require investments that stop pollution. Step 2: stop pitting workers against the community and against each other. Step 3: stop the fake promises and gaslighting of people who care about this place and its future. Step 4: listen to the genuine needs of this community.

In May, UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh released a study that showed that the Air Quality Index (AQI) was linked with asthma-related hospital visits among children in Allegheny County. Even AQI “moderate” days sends some kids to the hospital. The association between air quality and asthma-related hospitalizations was strongest among children aged 6 through 11 and Black children.¹ How many children were sent to the hospital today?

During the first 180 days of 2022, including today, our region's air ranked among the top 10 worst places in the country for at least a portion of the day 97 times (54 % of all days) and was ranked as #1 worst air 26 of these times (14% of all days), including this morning ([EPA's Airnow Worst 10 AQI](#)).

The Breathe Project encourages ACHD to move forward aggressively to reduce emissions at Edgar Thomson. Let’s save lives, reduce burdens on vulnerable people, heal past traumas by stopping the repeating of them, and take action that makes everyone proud.

Thank you,

Matthew M. Mehalik, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Breathe Project

¹ Franziska Rosser; Yueh-Ying Han; Scott D Rothenberger; Erick Forno; Christina Mair; and Juan C. Celedón, “Air Quality Index and Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations for Childhood Asthma,” *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1513/AnnalsATS.202105-539OC>, viewed May 11, 2022.