

January 10, 2024

Remarks for Public Comment

ACHD Public Hearing on US Steel Corporation Clairton Plant, Title V Operating Permit
Clairton Municipal Building
551 Ravensburg Blvd.
Clairton, PA 15025

Dear Ms. Truchan and ACHD Staff:

I am Matthew Mehalik, Executive Director of the Breathe Project. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed revisions to the US Steel Clairton Coke Works' Title V Operating Permit.

ACHD must continue to revise the permit so that ongoing air pollution episodes at the Clairton Coke Works stop occurring by requiring a publicly accessible, verifiable compliance plan for the facility:

The Allegheny County Health Department has issued at least 17 enforcement orders and notices of violation to the US Steel Clairton Coke Works since January of 2020. ACHD has fined US Steel over \$12.3 million for penalties associated with emissions violations over this period. US Steel is paying approximately \$770,000 per quarter in penalties over this period¹. This is in addition to the \$2.7 million US Steel paid as part of the June 2019 settlement agreement for violations stemming from 2017 and 2018². The permit structure and fine structure are clearly not working. This history of paying fines instead of reducing emission violations indicates a willingness of US Steel to operate the Clairton Coke Works in a “pay to pollute” relationship with ACHD. This needs to end, as these emissions are harming our region’s residents.

Pollution from the Clairton Coke Works must be reduced.

Allegheny County is in the top 1% of all counties for cancer risk from point source air toxics emissions. 90 percent of this risk is attributable to coke oven facilities, with 90 percent attributable to the Clairton Coke Works ([Cancer Risk in Allegheny County, Pa., May 2021](#)).

The Liberty PM 2.5 monitor, the monitor most impacted by emissions from the Clairton Coke Works ranked in the worst 10 percent nationally of all monitored locations using the latest qualified EPA data.

In 2022, using the latest qualified EPA data, residents in the area have experienced air quality being ranked in the [top-10 worst airsheds](#) in the U.S. 40% of all days for at least a portion of the day based on EPA’s Air Quality Index hourly values. These areas ranked as the #1 worst airshed for about 10% of these periods. The Clairton Coke Works cannot continue to limp along at the expense of the health of people.

¹ See “ACHD Air Quality Enforcement Actions 2020 – 2022,” online: <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Programs/Air-Quality/Enforcement-Actions.aspx>, accessed February 22, 2022.

² See “ACHD Settlement Agreement and Order #19060,” online: https://www.alleghenycounty.us/uploadedFiles/Allegheny_Home/Health_Department/Resources/Legal/Docket/USS-ACHD-Settlement-Agreement-and-Order-190604.pdf, accessed February 22, 2022.

Recently, NYU's School of Public Health [documented the improvements in health](#) in communities near the Shenango Coke Works in Allegheny County after it closed in 2016: Average weekly visits to the local emergency departments for heart-related problems decreased by 42% immediately after the shutdown. The Clairton Coke Works is ten times larger than this Shenango facility.

The current draft ACHD has brought forward is STILL inadequate and fails to address many of the problems EPA highlighted when they rejected ACHD's last draft last fall:

- The EPA ordered ACHD to make changes to the earlier draft of the permit in 2023. ACHD did not make all of the needed updates as required.
- The permit draft's monitoring, recordkeeping and reporting requirements are still inadequate to ensure compliance with emissions limits.
- The current draft does not call for continuous emissions monitoring systems for particulate matter (PM) for all boilers other than boiler 1 and boiler 2. This means that there is no way to ensure the Coke Works can be in compliance with the hourly particle (PM) emissions limits.
- The permit should require continuous emissions monitoring systems (CEMS) on the coke batteries to monitor for Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), such as benzene, because emissions can vary for different types of coal and coking procedures in the coking batteries. Without such monitors, there is no way to ensure the Coke Works is in compliance with VOC emissions standards and limits.
- The permit should require the reporting of daily emissions data when the monthly emissions reports are submitted, along with monthly emissions data and rolling annual emissions data. The reporting requirements should match data record keeping, which includes this daily information.
- There are typos in the review memo that need to be fixed, because the typos point to the wrong provisions in the permit and risk confusion that could interfere with accountability.
- The permit has proposed reductions in monitoring and inspection frequencies of the cooling tower without sufficient justification.
- ACHD has proposed making additional changes to the permit not based on the directives in EPA's order. Many of those changes lack sufficient explanation and reasoning. They also lack the sufficient transparency needed to allow for meaningful public comment. These changes include removing some limits and reducing some monitoring frequencies, among other revisions.

This permit has been expired since 2017 and was created over a decade ago. It is time to update this permit so that our region's air is improved, our region's health is improved, and impacts from this egregious source, the US Steel Clairton Coke Works, end.

Sincerely,

Matthew M. Mehalik, Ph.D.