



# Environmental Groups Support Plan to Boost Funding for Allegheny County Air Quality Program

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## Environmental Groups Support Plan to boost funding for Allegheny County Air Quality Program

*Groups Support Increased Fees to Polluters; Object to Cuts to Allegheny County Air Inspectors*

**PITTSBURGH** - Allegheny County recently announced plans to increase funding for its air quality program. Local environmental groups reacted by expressing support for the county Health Department's proposal to increase fees from polluting industries, but object to the county's plan to eliminate several positions from the air program, including engineers, technicians, and inspectors.

"Allegheny County needs a fully funded Air Program - full stop," **GASP Executive Director Patrick Campbell** said. "Fully funding the program through polluter fees is vital for our health, and that means raising enough money to avoid cuts to personnel needed for environmental inspections and effective enforcement."

The Allegheny County Health Department unveiled an initial plan for fee increases at a June 10 Air Pollution Control Advisory Committee meeting. Department officials revealed a \$1.8 million deficit and said the permit fee increases and other measures are necessary to help offset the shortfall.

**Lisa Graves Marcucci, community organizer for the Environmental Integrity Project** and lifelong Mon Valley resident, said: "Residents of Allegheny County rely on the Health Department's air program to keep us safe from dangerous pollution and hold companies accountable to the law. In order to ensure protections are in place there needs

to be Clean Air Act expertise in the department with proper financing to ensure compliance.”

The [new proposal](#) would bring in an additional \$1.9 million by increasing fees charged to polluters, and would create a new outreach coordinator position to work with Environmental Justice communities. However, the proposal would also eliminate multiple positions from the air program, including engineers, technicians, inspectors.

While environmental groups like GASP, the PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center, the Environmental Integrity Project, and Breathe Project are lauding plans to bolster funding for the Air Quality Program, they expressed concern about plans to cut positions and encouraged the county to consider going further to fully-fund the Department.

"You can't put a price on our health, which is why we need to ensure county officials have the money they need to protect residents from toxic industrial air pollution," **Zachary Barber, the clean air advocate with the PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center**, said. "Rather than cut staff, Allegheny County should fully fund the Air Quality Program by charging polluters the true cost of protecting our health."

"Raising fees on polluters is a crucial step in prioritizing residents' health and increasing the Department's capacity to hold companies accountable to the law," said Matt Walker, Clean Air Council Advocacy Director. "However, the County must not force ACHD to eliminate engineers, inspectors, or other staff essential to ACHD's ability to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Act, which is necessary for protecting residents from toxic air pollution."

Advocates plan to speak in support of a fully funded Air Quality Program at the next Allegheny County Board of Health meeting July 17.

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*GASP is a nonprofit citizens' group in Southwestern PA working for a healthy, sustainable environment. Founded in 1969, GASP has been a diligent watchdog, educator, litigator, and policymaker on environmental issues, with a focus on air quality in the Pittsburgh region.*

*The PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center is dedicated to protecting our air, water and open spaces. We work to protect the places we love, advance the environmental values we share, and win real results for our environment.*

*The Environmental Integrity Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting public health and our natural resources by holding polluters and government agencies accountable under the law, advocating for tough but fair environmental standards, and empowering communities fighting for clean air and clean water.*

*The Clean Air Council is an environmental health advocacy organization fighting for everyone's right to a healthy environment. Protecting people's health from the harmful impacts of pollution has always been the Council's primary goal.*