

Oakland-Wide Community Meeting

Minutes: January 26, 2021

Hosted by OPDC on Zoom

Project: Breathe Project

Presenters: **Christine Graziano, Consultant**
Matt Mehalik, Executive Director

The Breathe Project began in 2011 in response to the air quality problem that affects the entire Allegheny County region and necessitates collective action. Scientists, residents, and activists work together in this coordinating hub. Allegheny County has received failure ratings from the American Lung Association for over a decade (ozone emissions throughout the year, particles on an annual and daily basis). Allegheny County's air quality is rated as poor 2/3 of the time. Oakland's air ranks in the 6-20% worst air in US. The problem is particularly acute in Mon Valley. Particulate matter, which can enter your body and cause higher cancer levels, is the major culprit with air pollution. Most of Allegheny County's pollution comes from industry, particularly the metal industry. Allegheny County is in top 10% of counties for air pollution related cancer. Clean energy is an alternative – there are twice as many clean energy jobs in Pennsylvania than fossil fuel jobs. Email MMehalik at mmehalik@breatheproject.org with any additional questions or to get involved.

CGraziano's involvement with the Breathe Project began with mapping health problems with correlation to air pollution. She focuses on two possible emission sites underneath the Birmingham Bridge: Lindy Paving and Hanover Concrete facilities.

The Health Department can release certain pollutants in tons/year (listed on PowerPoint), but this is not an extensive list. Several of these pollutants have negative health effects, and their use is on the rise. Lindy Paving is operating under an expired permit, which they are permitted to do until the Health Department approves a renewed permit application. There is a unique window for us to learn more about their processes and externalities.

The Breathe Project is recruiting hosts for low-cost citizen science [monitors](#) to measure pollution levels in Pittsburgh. This information will help find a baseline for non-operational levels vs operational levels. [Smell Pittsburgh](#) is an app that can be used to report concerning smells. The Breathe Project encourages taking pictures when you see a facility's visible pollution, and recommend you communicate your grievances with City and County representatives.

More resources:

Cameras: <https://breatheproject.org/learn/breathe-cam/>

Tools for what you can do: <https://breatheproject.org/take-action/#what-can-you-do>

Campaigns you can join: <https://breatheproject.org/take-action/#campaigns>

Air pollution and public health: <https://breatheproject.org/database/>

Q: Is there a higher risk of COVID-19 due to air quality concerns?

A: Harvard released a study showing a strong link between pollution exposure and death/severity of disease rate. Facilities in our community that release the most emissions were not shut down during the pandemic because they are considered essential workers.

- "Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States." Xiao Wu, Rachel C. Nethery, Benjamin M. Sabath, Danielle Braun, Francesca Dominici. medRxiv 2020.04.05.20054502; doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054502>

Results: We found that an increase of only 1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ is associated with an 8% increase in the COVID-19 death rate (95% confidence interval [CI]: 2%, 15%). The results were statistically significant and robust to secondary and sensitivity analyses. **Conclusions:** a small increase in long-term exposure to $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ leads to a large increase in the COVID-19 death rate. Despite the inherent limitations of the ecological study design, our results underscore the importance of continuing to enforce existing air pollution regulations to protect human health both during and after the COVID-19 crisis

Q: Is air dispersion modeling of the asphalt plant being conducted?

A: It is not required, but we can request this if there is sufficient interest. We have a copy of the application for renewal, but we do not have a timeline for the Lindy plant or the reports that they are required to submit during the last five-year permit. Seeing these reports would tell us a lot. We know they have had failed stack tests. There is usually a 30-day window between when a permit is posted and when comments are due. If there is enough interest, the public can demand a public hearing on such permits.

- ACHD permits out for public comment: <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Programs/Air-Quality/Public-Comment-Notices.aspx>
- CREATELab at CMU will soon publish something modeling wind patterns related to a few pollution sources.

Q: Are there any specific types of cancer caused by air pollution?

A: We have elevated rates of lung, liver, and bladder cancer in Pittsburgh compared to the rest of the country.