



It's Time to Demand Clean Air in Western PA

I want to thank Don Hopey and David Templeton for their year-long investigation “Mapping mortality: A special report on air pollution.” The reporters’ findings from this ecological study are a great first step. We know there is a linkage between poor air quality and adverse health conditions and we must demand better enforcement and regulations to safeguard our health and the environment. The American Lung Association’s 2010 State of the Air report ranked Pittsburgh the third worst city in the country for the amount of short-term particle pollution. We were ranked fifth for people most at risk for year-round particle pollution. This pollution has lasting effects on our health including increased rates in asthma, heart attacks, strokes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). In Pittsburgh we are finding children’s visits to the emergency room for asthma symptoms are 400% higher than any other city in the US.

I’m not only the executive director of an organization that educates the community about environmental health risks; I’m also the mother of three children, two of whom have been diagnosed with asthma. It’s time to demand cleaner air for our families. We need a holistic approach to policy changes that includes reform at the federal, state and local level, including more monitoring and Allegheny County’s adoption of guidelines that cover hazardous air pollutants, many of which are identified as known carcinogens. Our region’s air has improved. We’re no longer referred to as the "Smoky City," but we have a long way to go.

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