



Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. Hotline



Fall 2006

www.gasp-pgh.org

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Allegheny County Board of Health Approves \$500,000 Grant to Clean Up Local School Buses

by Rachel Filippini, GASP Executive Director

GASP commends the Allegheny County Board of Health for approving a half-million dollar Clean Air Fund expenditure to help reduce the toxic diesel emissions from local school buses.

In many respects, riding on a school bus is one of the safest ways students can travel to school. But the fact is that the young passengers on a conventional school bus are being exposed during their daily commute to diesel pollutants that impede respiratory systems, cause asthma attacks, and have been linked to a wide variety of other adverse health effects including cancer and premature death.

For young children, diesel pollution from school buses is especially harmful.

Compared with adults, children have a heightened sensitivity to air pollution due to physiological differences, higher activity levels, and greater exposure to outdoor pollution. Their developing bodies are less capable of defending themselves against pollutants, such as fine particulates, which can lodge deep in the lungs. Children typically have a faster metabolism, and breathe at twice the rate of an adult, thereby receiving and retaining greater doses of pollution. They tend to breathe through their mouths, bypassing the natural filtration protection of their nose, and spend more time outdoors, especially when air pollution levels are at their peak.

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Bad Air Days

by Kate St. John, GASP Board Member

If you noticed bad air quality this summer, you were not mistaken. On bad air days, southwestern Pennsylvania experienced heightened levels of ground level ozone and fine particulate (PM2.5), both of which threaten human health. Your lungs may have told you there was a problem.

Did you know you can find the air quality forecast--and air quality history--on the web?

Both DEP and EPA make air quality forecasts, much like weather forecasts, so we can change our plans if the air is bad. The forecasts are especially necessary in

summer because hot weather causes chemical reactions among air pollutants, forming even more ozone and PM2.5. The heat also raises electricity demand so coal-fired power plants burn more coal and emit more pollutants that can become ozone and PM2.5. It's a vicious cycle until the weather breaks.

One of the best places for viewing the forecasts and reports is EPA's Air Now website at <http://airnow.gov>. The site provides today's air quality forecast plus interactive maps showing the changes in air quality

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Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. (GASP) is a non-profit citizens group in southwestern Pennsylvania working for a healthy, sustainable environment. Founded in 1969, GASP has been a diligent watchdog, educator, litigator, and policy-maker on many environmental issues, with a focus on air quality in the Pittsburgh region.

Cleaner Emissions in the Forecast for the Cheswick Power Station

by Sue Seppi, GASP Project Manager

Coal-fired electricity generating plants generally create a lot of dirty emissions which can adversely affect the health of the population. On existing plants, the remedy for this problem has typically been an array of pollution control equipment, the addition of which is often driven by emission reduction regulations. The familiar Reliant Cheswick Power Station located in Springdale is no exception. The facility currently has an electrostatic precipitator and flue gas conditioning system to remove particulate matter (soot). Nitrogen oxide emissions are reduced through a low-NOx burner system. In 2003, a Selective Catalytic Reduction System (SCR) was added to further reduce nitrogen oxides. Nitrogen oxides contribute to acid rain and fine particulates.

Sounds impressive, but unfortunately a lot of problematic emissions sail right past these controls. Sulfur dioxide, which also contributes to acid rain and fine particulates, is often emitted in large quantities from coal-fired generators. The elusive gas is no small matter at Cheswick Power Station. According to the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD), the generator emits at least 80% of all point source sulfur dioxide emissions in Allegheny County. This amounted to about 41,000 tons in 2004.

In May of this year, Reliant Energy, on behalf of Orion Midwest, LP, submitted an application to ACHD for an Installation Permit to add a control device for sulfur dioxide known as a "flue gas desulfurization system," also called a "scrubber." According to Reliant, the scrubber will remove at least 98% of the SO₂. As an additional benefit, the scrubber will remove at least 70% of mercury emissions. While adding the scrubber to the plant is not required, there are looming federal regulatory deadlines requiring reductions in these pollutants.

Other pollutant emissions such as beryllium, hydrogen fluoride, hydrogen chloride, lead and flue particulates will also decrease with the scrubber application. Recently, GASP members and local residents in the Cheswick/Springdale area signed petitions and letters urging Reliant Cheswick Station to go forward with a scrubber installation, so it is clear that many community members will be pleased to see this additional emissions control.

Installation of the \$250 million scrubber is tentatively set to begin in early 2007, and its forecasted in-service date is the fourth quarter of 2009. The scrubber will be a separate structure and will be connected to a new smokestack which will be 552 feet tall, compared to the present familiar red and white stack which is 750 feet tall. The taller stack will remain but be inactive. There should be 400 construction jobs and 20 new permanent jobs associated with the scrubber project.

In a nutshell, this is how the scrubber works: the scrubber combines large quantities of ground limestone with water to form a slurry mixture, which is then sprayed into the scrubber. The limestone will be imported by barge with truck backup. The slurry sprayed into the scrubber absorbs sulfur dioxide from the emission stream. Forced air in a lower area of the scrubber will cause gypsum crystals to be formed from the sulfur dioxide laden slurry. The gypsum will be treated and dewatered to become sellable byproduct (synthetic gypsum can be used for wallboard). The gypsum will be shipped off site by barge or truck. The limestone and gypsum processes, handling, and transport will be a significant presence on the site and need to have their own emissions controlled.

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The **Hotline** is the quarterly newsletter of the Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc.

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GASP Mission Statement

GASP will act to obtain for the residents of southwestern Pennsylvania clean air, water, and land in order to create the healthy, sustainable environment and quality of life to which we are entitled.

Methods of Achieving Mission

GASP is a citizens group based in Southwestern PA which focuses on Allegheny County environmental issues. When pertinent to these concerns, we participate in state and national environmental decisions.

We believe in the public's right to receive accurate and thorough information on these issues and to actively participate in the decision making process.

To achieve our environmental goals on behalf of our membership, GASP will advocate, educate, serve as an environmental watchdog, mobilize action, and litigate when necessary.

We will work both independently and in cooperation with like-minded individuals and groups as determined by the Board of Directors.

We will uphold GASP's reputation for scientific integrity, honesty, and responsible involvement.

Bad Air Days
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as the day progresses. These maps are archived so you can review them days and months later.

The Air Now website categorizes pollutant levels into health-related descriptors and colors: Good, Moderate, Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, Unhealthy (for everyone), Very Unhealthy, and Hazardous. Sensitive groups are those with breathing problems including asthma and lung disease and, for PM2.5, those with heart disease.

In the summer of 2006, Pittsburgh's air quality usually hovered between good and moderate, but several hot days pushed us into the unhealthy range for sensitive groups. As of August 31, the region had six summer days when we exceeded the 8-hour ozone standard and Liberty/Clairton experienced one PM2.5 day that was Unhealthy for everyone.

Here's a sampling of some of our worst days as reported on EPA's Air Now website. As you will see, ozone and PM2.5 often peak hand in hand.

The season kicked off to an unhealthy start on Memorial Day with three bad air days in a row: May 29, 30, and 31. These were surprisingly hot days and it told in the numbers.

Ozone and PM2.5 were Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups on May 29, 30 and 31. PM2.5 was also in this category on May 29 and Unhealthy for everyone in the Liberty/Clairton area on May 30.

The weather broke for a while, then heated up higher ozone levels on June 17 and PM2.5 on June 18. Again we had a respite during the cool spell in July, though PM2.5 was unhealthy for sensitive groups in some areas on July 11, 20 and 26.

August brought us more heat and more bad air days. Ozone was unhealthy for sensitive groups on August 18 and 26 while PM2.5 was in that category on August 1, 2, 25 and 26.

As of this writing we have only a few more weeks of hot weather left so we hope the worst is behind us for 2006.

To see the reports and forecasts online visit:

EPA's "Air Now" website: <http://airnow.gov>

DEP's Air Quality Partnership website:
http://www.dep.state.pa.us/aq_apps/aqpartners/default.asp

Allegheny County's Air Quality website (no forecasts):
<http://www.achd.net/airqual/airstart.html>



Photo: Donald Gibbon



These two photos of Pittsburgh's skyline, taken in May and June 2006, show the difference between a good air day and a bad air day. Thanks to Donald Gibbon for sharing these photos with GASP.

GASP Receives Funding for Two Environmental Education Projects

We are pleased to announce that GASP has been awarded funding from both the PA Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct environmental education among local teachers, students and community members. If you are interested in learning more about either opportunity please contact the GASP office at 412-325-7382.

Air, Art & Life: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Air Quality in the Pittsburgh Region--Funded by the PA DEP

GASP will be conducting three unique teacher workshops in Allegheny and Washington Counties that will incorporate science, art and regional history to provide teachers of multiple subjects with a fascinating connection between the Donora Smog Disaster of 1948 and current air quality concerns in southwestern Pennsylvania. The workshops will be conducted by GASP's Education Coordinator, Bridget Yupcavage, with the help of Gwen Morton, a University of Pittsburgh graduate who wrote and performed a one-woman play about the Donora Smog Disaster. These workshops will be highly interactive and artistic. They will serve as a demonstration of alternative approaches to teaching and understanding air quality.

Fueling the Future Project--Funded by the EPA

GASP will partner with Steel City Biofuels to educate teachers, students and the community about the human health and environmental impacts associated with diesel exhaust and pollution from vehicles. Teachers will learn about retrofit technology, alternative fuels, alternative vehicles (hybrids), and strategies for reducing pollution exposure. GASP plans to target middle and high school teachers in Allegheny and surrounding counties for hands-on workshops. In addition, we will be conducting several community clinics.

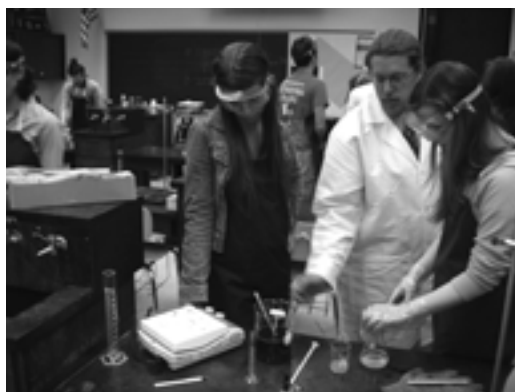


PHOTO: BRIDGET YUPCAVAGE

Mt. Lebanon High School students make biodiesel fuel during a workshop with GASP and Steel City Biofuels.

Alternative Energy Program Series

GASP is arranging some special events to enable our members and friends to learn more about alternative energy efforts being made right in our region. Not a GASP member yet? Join now (see page 7) or join on-line at www.gasp-pgh.org to ensure you receive invitations and discounts to our upcoming events.

Friday, October 20, 2006, 10 AM–2 PM—Switchgrass Farm Tour (limit of 15 attendees)

Join Tom Stickle, Director of the *Switchgrass for Bioenergy Project* as he takes us on a walking tour of Monona Farms, near Ligonier. His 500-acre switchgrass farm is the only Conservation Reserve farm in Pennsylvania devoted to switchgrass research. Mr. Stickle will speak about various aspects of his ongoing research into this plant-based form of renewable energy.

Lunch will be provided. \$10 members/\$15 nonmembers. Call 412-325-7382 or email bridget@gasp-pgh.org to register and for directions and carpooling information. Space is limited and reservations are required for all events.

Upcoming Events (more info will be provided to GASP members by mail and will be available on the GASP website):

Wednesday, November 15, 2006 6:30–8:00 PM—Community Clinic on Reducing our Exposure to Diesel Exhaust, held at Construction Junction in Point Breeze (limit of 35 attendees)

February 2007—Tour of Solar Power Industries, manufacturer of photovoltaic panels and other solar products

April 2007—Tour of Conservation Consultants, Inc.'s LEED-rated non-profit center

Cheswick Power Station continued from page 2

The Installation Permit Application is presently under review by ACHD. If and when the Draft Installation Permit is issued, there will be opportunity for the public to comment

on it. GASP will list the availability of the Draft Installation Permit and other related details on our website. Look also for further information on the GASP Alert e-mail list. If you are not already subscribed, you can sign up on the website: <http://www.gasp-pgh.org>



\$500,000 Grant for School Buses continued from page 1

Lastly, children are typically shorter, placing them closer to the ground where many pollutants collect.

Locally, an estimated 10% of schoolchildren in Allegheny County have asthma, based on 2003-2004 school year health statistics compiled by the state Health Department, making it one of the leading chronic illnesses for this population. A study of the economic costs of asthma in children found that children with asthma incurred 2.8 times more health care expenditures than children without asthma. In addition, asthmatic children were more than twice as likely to visit the emergency room and 3.5 times more likely to be hospitalized.¹

While school buses are only responsible for a small share of the total diesel emissions in Allegheny County, they regularly expose children and the communities they travel through to soot, smog-forming pollutants, and toxic air contaminants. Unlike smokestacks, diesel emissions are released at ground level where they are most concentrated and toxic. There are few other sources of air pollution in our environment that are as pervasive and potent as diesel exhaust.

The emissions from diesel school buses are very real and significant, but the good news is that the emission control technology available today can dramatically reduce toxic diesel emissions. The \$500,000 Clean Air Fund request will assist Allegheny County school districts in purchasing this much needed control technology. The program established from this grant will provide a three-to-one match for the purchase of diesel retrofit technology. Lower income school districts can apply for grants requiring no matching funds. This program will be open both to school districts which own their own buses and those which contract out for school bus service. The majority of Allegheny County school districts, including the City of Pittsburgh, contract out for service. There are currently four school districts in Allegheny County which have already retrofit all or a portion of their school buses with a variety of retrofit technologies: Deer Lakes, North Allegheny, Penn Hills and Plum.

Children are exposed to toxic diesel pollution from both the tailpipe and leaking engine crankcases. To ensure the most adequate protection, both areas must be addressed with diesel emission control technology. The most effective tailpipe control is the diesel particulate filter, which can cut toxic soot from the tailpipe 85%-90%. However, even these advanced tailpipe controls should be supplemented with effective crankcase filtration controls. Studies conducted by the Clean Air Task Force demonstrated that the engine crankcase is the largest source of PM_{2.5} (fine particulates)



PHOTO: MAREN LEVIA COOKE

Penn Hills is one of four school districts in Allegheny County with retrofitted school buses.

affecting the air quality of the interior cabin in conventional school buses. Clean Air Task Force concluded that, "The elimination of PM_{2.5} self-pollution inside conventional school buses is only possible with a closed-crankcase filtration retrofit device."²

The cost of cleaning up school buses is not insignificant, but of course the cost of doing nothing and continuing to let our children be exposed to unnecessarily high levels of toxic diesel emissions doesn't come without a price either. While the \$500,000 Clean Air Fund grant is substantial, unfortunately it is not enough to solve our county's diesel school bus pollution problem. There are nearly 1,800 diesel school buses traversing our county each day. Over time, some of these buses will be replaced with 2007 and later models which will come equipped with emission control devices in order to meet more stringent federal pollution standards. Many buses, however, will not be replaced for quite some time and it will be necessary to retrofit them with emission control technology. It will take much more funding and the will of school districts and school bus companies to solve the problem. The \$500,000 Clean Air Fund expenditure is an excellent start, and we are hopeful that other public and private entities will help share in the responsibility of protecting our children's health.

1. Union of Concerned Scientists, School Bus Pollution Report Card 2006, http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_vehicles/big_rig_clean-up/clean-school-bus-pollution.html

2. Clean Air Task Force Investigation of School Bus Engine Crankcase Emissions and Controls, http://www.catf.us/publications/factsheets/Diesel_Crankcase_Emissions_and_Controls.pdf ♿

Hays Woods Update

by Fran Harkins, GASP Board Member

The Department of Environmental Protection's review of the application submitted by the Pittsburgh Development Group (PDG) to mine coal in Hays Woods continues. After a number of pre-denial letters and conferences, concerns relating to erosion and sedimentation (E&S), geo-technical issues, storm water management and traffic planning for the final development remain.

Often characterized as "the forest in the city," the 635 acres of Hays Woods rise steeply from the Monongahela River and the three miles of Route 837 between Becks Run and Glass Run roads. Only when approached from its southern boundary in Baldwin or as seen from the air can one appreciate its sheer size relative to its urban setting. Directly east is the lowest-lying portion of the Streets Run Watershed where historical flooding problems have long plagued the community of Hays.

On Feb. 2, 2006 the DEP cited 81 deficiencies in the surface mine permit (SMP) application. Since then some deficiencies have been corrected. However, where the DEP asks for details, PDG's responses often promise that those details will be provided later—after their much-desired approval of the SMP occurs. Hopefully, the DEP will insist that PDG provides detailed answers to crucial fill and storm-water management issues before their decision is finalized. The fact that an Allegheny County flood plan exists triggers the DEP to analyze carefully the post-development stormwater management plans for the site, not just the management of stormwater run-off during the blasting, mining and construction phases.

Originally, Charles Betters and his PDG Land Development Company had envisioned building a slots casino and a thoroughbred race track along with a housing development and shops. However, his desire to build the racetrack/casino combo was thwarted. Interestingly, PDG continues to include a race track in the SMP application, despite the fact that a license for a racetrack will not be issued. While a training track for horses is still viable for purposes of the SMP, the economic prospects of such a track inside the City of Pittsburgh is highly questionable.

Apparently, PDG finds itself in a bit of a box. Key to its rationale for needing to level hundreds of acres of a hilly forested woodland is the large amount of flat acreage needed for a horse track. Alternative sites, also with many hundreds of acres, were analyzed and rejected by PDG, in the part of the SMP application termed "Alternatives Analysis."



View of Hays Woods from an airplane

Consequently, PDG continues to pursue the need for a racetrack in its application process to avoid undermining its own argument for needing to mine extensively.

Traffic plans also remain inadequate. While PDG has submitted a plan to haul mined, crushed coal from the site via the Southside's Hot Metal Bridge, the City of Pittsburgh still awaits PDG's post-development traffic plan. Barred by the City from access via Becks Run Road and residential streets, the only access is from the Hays' cloverleaf and Glass Run Road. With no foreseeable funding for the Mon-Fayette Expressway, many vehicles accessing the site would traverse the busy Homestead Grays/Hi Level Bridge, the Glenwood Bridge or West Carson Street producing traffic congestion and increased diesel pollution in West Homestead, Hazelwood and the South Side.

GASP encourages you to contact the DEP to express your concerns regarding this SMP application. See a bird's eye view of the site, do a flyover and get more information at www.savehayswoods.org. Address your comments to Mr. Paul Cestoni, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Armbrust Professional Center, RR #2, Box 603-C, Greensburg, PA 15601-8739.



R.I.P. Mon/Fayette Expressway

by Marilyn Skolnick, GASP Board Member

This article was printed in the newsletter of the Allegheny Group of the Sierra Club, Fall 2006.

Wakes are usually a happy affair, and this one was no exception. On a clear night, July 21, 2006, on the lawn of Braddock Mayor John Fetterman's home, a gathering of about 70 people came together to celebrate the death of the Mon/Fayette Toll Road. People of all ages came, from the youngest, several months old, to those such as your writer, who was at the birth of the miserable idea (one morning at California University where proponents of the project described what was to be the biggest waste of money Pennsylvanians ever spent).

The wake was the brainchild of Heather Sage of PennFuture, and was co-sponsored by Sierra Club, GASP, Citizens for Alternatives to New Toll Roads, and a number of other groups.

As you have probably know by now, the consulting firm CONSAD did a study and found that there is not enough money to complete the toll road, and subsequent studies have confirmed that conclusion.


And so we bid the Mon/Fayette "good bye" and pray that, unlike the phoenix, it never rises out of the ashes. 



PHOTO: MAREN LEVIA COOKE

Heather Sage of PennFuture leads the crowd in protest, bringing attendees up to date on the fact that there is no money for the Mon/Fayette project and citizens are unwilling to let it destroy communities like Braddock.

This was a joyful event with enough food and drink to satisfy even the pickiest eater. However, noticed by their absence were the media. For some reason, the event was not notable enough for them.

The wake was held off Braddock Ave. across from what is said to be the first Carnegie Library. It is a magnificent building and appears to have been designed by the same architect who designed the Allegheny County Courthouse.

Once everyone had eaten to their fill, we marched in a single line to a special spot in Braddock Avenue where, Mayor Fetterman explained, had the toll road been built, it would have cut Braddock in half, completely destroying any plans for redevelopment. Then, with a single gesture, the lights in this abandoned building lit up with the words "NO MFY." A roar arose from the 70 people followed by applause.



Join GASP Today!

- \$35 Grassroots Supporters (\$15 low income/student rate)
- \$60 Grassroots Contributors
- \$100 Grassroots Patrons
- \$250 Clean Air Defenders
- \$500 Clean Air Protectors
- \$___ Other

Call GASP at (412) 325-7382 to learn about automatic monthly giving, deducted directly from your checking account or charged to your credit card. An easy, hassle-free way to support GASP all year round!

Name _____

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City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Check Visa Mastercard American Express

Card # _____

Exp. Date _____ Amount \$ _____

Signature _____

All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The official registration and financial information of GASP may be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

GASP at the Gallery

Join us at the Society for Contemporary Craft as we examine
Nature/Culture: Artists Respond to Their Environment

Saturday, November 4, 2006

7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Society for Contemporary Craft, 2100 Smallman St. in the Strip District

GASP cordially invites you to our annual fall benefit, where guests can learn about the exhibit Nature/Culture: Artists Respond to Their Environment. This exhibit compares works by contemporary artists that identify with culture and the byproducts of an urban society with works responding to nature and the natural environment. Particular attention will be given to the work of Los Angeles artist Kim Abeles. Abeles' "Presidential Commemorative Smog Plates" comment on the responses of U.S. Presidents to environmental issues. More information about the event can be found at <http://www.gasp-pgh.org>

Please note that this November 4th event replaces our previously scheduled October 7th event, Navigating a Course for Clean Air, due to a delay in the arrival of Pittsburgh Voyager's green boat.

Save the New Date!

Silent Auction Sneak Preview

Bid on items from:

Andy Warhol Museum
Carnegie Science Center
The Climbing Wall
E House Company
Harris Grill
Just Ducky Tours
Laurel Caverns
Littlearth
Mattress Factory
Pittsburgh Irish & Classical Theatre
Pittsburgh Opera
Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium
Schoolhouse Yoga
and much more!

GASP Receives a Bequest

GASP was honored to receive a special bequest from the estate of Thomas M. Kerr, Jr. We are pleased that he considered the work of GASP to be so important. Mr. Kerr was a long-time GASP supporter and life-long advocate of business ethics and civil liberties. Mr. Kerr's gift will assist GASP in continuing many of our important campaigns, as well as our legal and advocacy work.

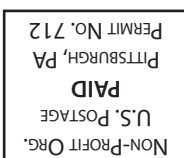
If you would like to remember GASP in your will and help to ensure our future work for clean air, please contact the GASP office at (412) 325-7382.

Ride Your Bike...

to Khalil's on Tuesday evenings during the month of October and enjoy a hearty meal for only \$8 (\$10 if you drive). Do your part to improve our regions air quality by riding a bike to the restaurant and you will receive hummos, fatoush salad, falafel with tahini, mujudra, ouzee, grapeleaves, pita, homemade cooked teas and pastries!

Where: Khalil's II Restaurant, 4757 Baum Blvd. Pgh, 15213
When: Tuesdays in October, 4-8 PM (October 10, 17, 24, 31)

A portion of the proceeds supports GASP!



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