



Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. Hotline



Summer 2007

www.gasp-pgh.org

Most livable city – least breathable ?

by Rachel Filippini, GASP Executive Director

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Just a few days after being ranked most livable city, Pittsburgh ranked second worst in air quality, right after Los Angeles. Then the jokes started – most livable, just don't plan to live that long... Were you surprised by the recent ranking? Was your reaction one of concern, anger and surprise – "What?! I thought Pittsburgh's air was a lot cleaner these days!"

The American Lung Association's *State of the Air* report ranked the Pittsburgh-New Castle metropolitan statistical area second worst for short term and year-round particulate pollution. The data on air quality throughout the United States were obtained from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality System. Allegheny County's monitoring data is submitted into this system. They analyzed

monitoring data recorded during the three-year monitoring period of 2003 - 2005. The entire report can be found at

http://lungaction.org/reports/sota07_full.html

So, what does this really mean? The abysmal ranking is driven by the fine particle monitor located in Liberty Boro, downwind of U.S. Steel's Clairton Coke Works (the largest coke-making facility in the United States), as well as other industry. The Liberty/Clairton area is a special non-attainment area for fine particles, also known as PM2.5 (particulate matter with diameters smaller than 2.5 micrometers). This area includes five municipalities: Glassport, Liberty, Lincoln, and Port Vue boroughs and the city of Clairton. This smaller non-attainment area is surrounded by the larger Pittsburgh-Beaver Valley non-attainment area. So, is all the air in the

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Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. (GASP) is a nonprofit 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.



Views of downtown Pittsburgh from Schenley Park. The lower photo was taken on a day with 45 mcg/m³ (micrograms per cubic meter) of PM2.5. Images courtesy of the Center for Atmospheric Particle Studies (<http://caps.web.cmu.edu>).

Allegheny County's Draft Air Toxics Guideline

by Kate St. John, GASP Board member

After considerable work on the part of the Air Toxics Subcommittee, a new Air Toxics Guideline (ATG) for Allegheny County is nearly complete.

The ATG is a trigger mechanism to help air quality staff and industry know if a proposed new or changed facility will require an in-depth air toxics study during the permitting phase. The draft lists air toxics, the manufacturing processes that may emit them, and a process for determining whether these new or modified sources will need an air toxics review. The document is currently not ready to implement because some toxics in the table are missing the threshold values needed for triggering a review.

The Air Toxics Guideline currently in use was published in 1988, and has never been revised. Since then, scientific research has improved, the EPA's toxic exposure list has changed, and it has become apparent that the threshold levels in the current guideline based on oral or skin exposure can not be used to determine acceptable ambient air levels.

The county's Air Pollution Control Advisory Committee – a group of industry, environmental and air quality specialists appointed by the County Executive – charged its Air Toxics Subcommittee with developing a new guideline.

First, the subcommittee determined the list of air toxics to include. A pollutant is listed if it is: classified as a hazardous air pollutant (HAP) by the US EPA; was reported in the most recent county Emissions Inventory report; or if it is listed as a persistent bio-accumulative toxin by the Toxic Release Inventory Program.

Next, the subcommittee determined the threshold levels for triggering a review. Since these levels are triggers, not regulations, the more conservative values were chosen from US EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS)

and Threshold Limit Values (TLVs) set by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. TLV and IRIS values are listed as reference points so that changes in the originating documents will propagate to the ATG. Unfortunately, TLV and IRIS values are not available for a sizable portion of the pollutants on the list, thus delaying implementation of the draft.

Lastly, the subcommittee outlined the procedure for determining whether a source will need an in-depth air toxics review:

If the facility's manufacturing process may potentially emit air toxics but its volume of raw material consumption is below the consumption threshold, it is exempted. If the facility's raw material consumption is above the consumption threshold, then planned emission levels for each air toxic are examined to see if they fall below the ATG's emissions threshold (IRIS or TLV). If below the threshold, the facility is exempted from further air toxics review. Finally, if planned air toxic emissions will be above the IRIS or TLV thresholds, then an in-depth study is required during the permitting process.

After many months of work, the draft document was presented to the Air Pollution Control Advisory Committee in January 2007. The presentation generated lots of discussion, especially concerning the list of pollutants and the fact that many of them are missing TLV or IRIS values. There was also near-unanimous support for holding a public comment period for the new ATG.

So the Air Toxics Guideline remains in draft form until the table of pollutants can be fully assigned threshold values. Stay tuned for news of its completion and its public comment period.



Note: Kate is also a member of the county Air Quality Advisory Board.

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.

GASP in the Courts

by Michael Parker, GASP Policy & Outreach Coordinator

As usual, the last several months have seen GASP actively engaged in litigation to improve the quality of our environment. As a result of our efforts, we have both good news and bad news to report.

In the spirit of getting the hard part over with, I shall start with the bad news.

In June 2005, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection issued an air quality plan approval to Wellington Development – WVDT, LLC. for the construction of the Greene Energy Resource Recovery Project in Greene County, Pennsylvania. We felt that the permit did not require the lowest achievable emission rate or the best available control technology, that it did not prevent damage to pristine wilderness areas, and that the DEP did not publish all pertinent information regarding the plant's pollution levels. Therefore, GASP, along with the National Parks Conservation Association and two individuals, Dennis Groce and Phil Coleman, appealed to the Pennsylvania Environmental Hearing Board for a permit that better protected air quality and for a process that provided for appropriate public participation. The appeal was carried through a grueling month-long trial, where the administrative judge ruled in favor of the DEP and Wellington Development. We obviously disagreed with the judge's ruling and petitioned for a review by the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court. After extensive briefing, the Commonwealth Court upheld the ruling of the Environmental Hearing Board.


After many months of hard work and after expending considerable resources, this loss was very disappointing. We have been sorely tempted to continue the fight and seek a review by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which is legally possible. When the limited potential for success was weighed against the risks of further cementing bad precedent and our depleted financial resources, GASP decided to step away from this particular fight. We wish Dennis Groce, the only remaining party to the suit, the best of luck as he carries the appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Thankfully, we still have the good news to report. On April 30th, the Supreme Court refused to hear the Environmental Protection Agency's arguments supporting a regulation that a coalition of environmental groups, including GASP, managed to have struck down by the federal courts.*

The defeated regulation created a loophole, called the Equipment Replacement Provision, which was an amendment to what is referred to as the Routine Maintenance, Repair, and Replacement ("RMRR") Exclusion from the Clean Air Act's New Source Review requirements. The Clean Air Act requires that any major source of air pollution that undergoes a physical change that results in an increase in emissions go through the rigorous New Source Review process. The Clean Air Act provides for a limited exclusion to this requirement when the physical change constitutes the routine maintenance, repair, and replacement of equipment, provided that there was no emission increase. The loophole created by the Bush administration allowed the RMRR exception for the replacement of equipment even with emission increases, so long as the replacement equipment was functionally equivalent and did not exceed a certain cost. If the regulation were left in place, tens of thousands of industrial facilities across the country could have installed "functionally equivalent" replacement equipment, increased emissions, and still avoided the review processes of the Clean Air Act. We are extremely grateful that this flawed regulation was struck down and that the U.S. Supreme Court has declined further review.

As these two cases illustrate, GASP's legal program is engaged in work of both regional and national importance. Litigation and legal advocacy are costly endeavors, and financial constraints can often hamstring the environmental cause in litigation. All too often the industrial opposition is well funded, a strength that they certainly exploit. With that in mind, we hope that some of our readers will consider making a donation to GASP's legal fund, which is currently severely depleted. If you wish to make a contribution, please refer to our website <http://www.gasp-pgh.org>, or address it to:

Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc.
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Pittsburgh, PA, 15217
Attn: Legal Fund

Every little bit will help us to continue our work to promote a healthy, sustainable environment. 

* The successful environmental coalition included the Alabama Environmental Council, the American Lung Association, the Clean Air Council, Communities for a Better Environment, the Delaware Nature Society, Environmental Defense, GASP, the Michigan Environmental Council, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Ohio Environmental Council, Scenic Hudson, the Sierra Club, the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, and U.S. PIRG. This coalition was very capably represented by Earthjustice, the Clean Air Task Force, and the NRDC.

Improving Indoor Air Quality

by Michael Parker, Policy & Outreach Coordinator



Indoor air quality is a topic not often mentioned in environmental circles. This inattention is not, however, due to the absence of a problem.

Scientific evidence indicates, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concurs, that indoor air can be more seriously polluted than the outdoor air in even the largest and most industrialized cities. In some buildings, certain indoor air pollutant concentrations have been estimated to exceed outdoor concentrations by a factor of 100. Coupled with these elevated pollutant levels is the fact that most Americans spend approximately 90% of their time indoors. Thus, because of higher concentrations and longer periods of exposure, many Americans are subject to the health risks of indoor air pollution. Unfortunately, the problem has become widespread, as evidenced by the fact that we now have terms describing the results of indoor air pollution, such as “sick building syndrome,” “building-related illness,” and “multiple chemical sensitivity.”

The primary causes of indoor air pollution are the off-gassing of pollutants and particulates from indoor sources, combined with poor ventilation. Pollutant sources vary considerably from building to building and include interior combustion devices, synthetic furnishings and building materials, household cleaning and maintenance products, certain personal care products, heating, cooling, and humidification devices, radon, and infiltration of outdoor pollution. Also included in the mix are biological sources, such as pet dander, mold, mildew, dust mites, cockroaches, and pollen. Interestingly, some also generally include bioeffluents, which are substances emitted through “normal biological processes.” Particular pollutants of concern are formaldehyde, xylene, toluene, benzene, trichloroethylene, chloroform, ammonia, alcohols, and acetone.

Symptoms of exposure to indoor air pollution can occur immediately after exposure or years later, and the immediate effects of exposure can result from a single exposure or from repeated exposure. The health effects of exposure to indoor air pollution include irritation of the eyes, nose or throat; headaches, dizziness, and fatigue; allergies, asthma, and congestion; and nervous system disorders. Most of these symptoms are associated with the common cold, so it is important to note their timing – if the symptoms appear when you enter a specific building or after a certain material has been used, then it is reasonable to assume indoor air pollution may be the cause.

Unfortunately, if you are experiencing symptoms of exposure to indoor air pollution, it is often very difficult to verify what particular pollutant is causing the problem.

Limited testing is available at home improvement stores for certain pollutants, particularly radon and carbon monoxide. Again, though, it is very important to note when and where symptoms occur. Did they occur after the use of pesticides, the installation of new carpeting, or were stains or solvents used in the area? Paying attention to the time and place of symptoms can provide strong clues to the source of exposure. Also, if you suspect biological factors, a visit to an allergist can help to identify the problem.

If you suspect that you have an air pollution problem in your home or office, there are several strategies for reducing indoor air pollution. The first and perhaps most effective strategy that should be employed is source control. Some methods of source control include being sure to change your furnace’s air filter regularly, using potentially toxic substances in well ventilated areas, avoiding purchasing products made from synthetic and composite materials, ensuring that your gas range is burning efficiently, limiting excessive indoor humidity, and using natural cleaning products.

Increasing ventilation is another important strategy for lessening indoor air pollution. However, in one of the ironies of modern life, increasing ventilation works to limit another desirable outcome, energy efficiency. Thus, with that factor in mind, increasing a building’s flow of outdoor air is probably best employed during fair weather and when undertaking high-pollutant emitting activities such as painting, paint-stripping, sanding, using kerosene heaters, using certain adhesives, soldering, and cooking with gas. Kitchen, window, attic, and bathroom fans that vent outdoors are all effective short-term methods of greatly increasing interior ventilation. Also, some newer buildings may have energy-efficient heat recovery ventilators, also known as air-to-air heat exchangers, which are designed to mechanically bring fresh air indoors without sacrificing energy-efficiency.

A third strategy for improving indoor air quality is the use of air cleaners. This is especially true when particles are the suspected primary culprit, since air filters are not typically designed to remove gaseous pollutants. Air filters come in many sizes and types, but their effectiveness is determined through a combination of two factors: the device’s ability to collect pollutants from the indoor air (often expressed as a percent efficiency rate), and how much air the device draws through its filter element (often measured in cubic feet per minute). An effective air filter must have both a high efficiency rate and a strong air draw. Also, without proper maintenance, an air filter will perform poorly over the long term, so attention to the manufacturer’s maintenance schedule is important.

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GASP Celebrates Fourth Annual Drive Cleaner Drive Greener

by Bridget Yupcavage, Education Coordinator



Beautiful weather, hundreds of people, and many environmentally friendly vehicles made for another exciting Drive Cleaner Drive Greener (DCDG) event on Saturday, May 19th at the Venture Outdoors festival. We were thankful to have the participation of the usual suspects: the Toyota Prius, Honda Civic Hybrid, and Ford

Escape Hybrid. This year we were also pleased to welcome a few new additions to the fuel-efficient family: the Toyota Camry, two electric mini-trucks, a vehicle running on waste vegetable oil and, last but not least, a SMART car.



ZAP electric mini-truck

What's so smart about the SMART car? It may be the supermini car that you have seen in movies or on the narrow streets of an old European city while on vacation – until now. After achieving great success in Europe due to its maneuverability and fuel efficiency, the smart car is ready to come to America. Starting in 2008, the official Mercedes-Benz SMART car will be available at limited dealerships.

Can't wait that long? You don't have to, because Ferrante Motor Cars of Vandergrift, PA is selling SMART cars that have been imported and Americanized by ZAP. Starting at \$26,000 and measuring only 8 feet 2.5 inches long (a mid-size sedan is about 16 feet), weighing only 1588 lbs (a mid-size sedan is over 3,000 lbs) and averaging 40 mph in the city and 46 mpg on the highway, the vehicle is one of the most fuel-efficient gasoline-powered cars on the planet.



PHOTOS: JONATHAN NADLE

Ferrante Motor Cars SMART car

Concerned about the safety of such a small vehicle? The car includes dual airbags, an Electronic Stabilization Program, skid control, anti-lock brakes, a steel safety shell, and reinforced construction. To find out more or arrange a test drive, contact Ferrante Motor Cars at 1-800-715-5675 or www.ferrantemotorcars.com.

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A final strategy for improving indoor air quality is a biological one: house plants. It is common knowledge that plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen during the process of photosynthesis. However, most people are unaware that houseplants can also remove many pollutants from indoor air. With the intent of designing sealed habitats for space explorations, NASA conducted experiments in the 1980s on the ability of house plants to remove toxins from indoor air. Those studies and follow-up studies have shown that many common house plants are very effective in removing a variety of pollutants from the air. Some common and particularly effective species include the Boston fern, bamboo palm, rubber plant, English ivy, peace lily, spider plant, and golden pothos. It is a good rule of thumb to have at least one houseplant in every room.

Any effective strategy for controlling indoor air pollution should include all of the methods discussed above: source control, improving ventilation, air filtration, and use of house plants.

For more information on indoor air quality, you can refer to the following sources:

1. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Office of Radiation and Indoor Air, The Inside Story: A Guide to Indoor Air Quality, EPA Doc. No. 402-K-93-007, p. 2 (April 1996)(available at www.epa.gov/iaq/ia-intro.html).
2. Dr. B. C. Wolverton, How To Grow Fresh Air, 50 Houseplants That Purify Your Home or Office (Penguin Books, 1996).
3. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Indoor Air Quality website, www.epa.gov/ebtpages/airindoorairpollution.html

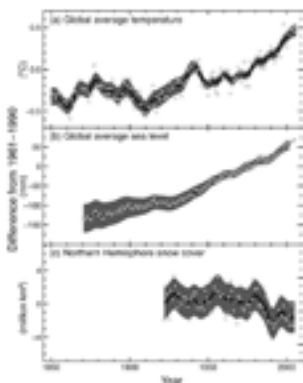
Global Warming: We Are the Cause, and We Are the Solution

by James Lyons-Weiler, PhD, GASP Advisory Board member and Maren Leyla Cooke, GASP Board member

Call it global warming, climate change or, as the Bush Administration once innocuously termed it, “climate variability”¹ – anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is real. Even when acknowledging the problem, the Administration has routinely promoted ‘solutions’ that tend to either require the consumption of more energy (hydrogen powered cars, for example), or continue the practice of burning fossil fuels (ethanol from energy-intensive agriculture). And as if mere words can undo an inconvenient truth, the current administration has gone so far as to suppress scientific findings that conflict with their preferred worldview.^{2,3}

Given the confusion injected into the public debate by these tactics, it is worth revisiting some of the basic foundations of our understanding of global warming, and viable solutions that might be expected to have a considerable impact in reducing the rate of greenhouse gas production by civilization.

The direct evidence of global warming is incontrovertible. Global mean surface temperatures, measured directly at numerous sites around the world, have been rising more or less steadily since temperature measurements began.



Observed changes in global average surface temperature (top panel), global average sea level (center, from tide gauge and satellite data), and snow cover during March and April in the Northern Hemisphere (bottom panel) during the period 1961-1990. The shaded bands represent the observational uncertainties.

SOURCE: INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE – FOURTH ASSESSMENT REPORT SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS (FEBRUARY 2007).

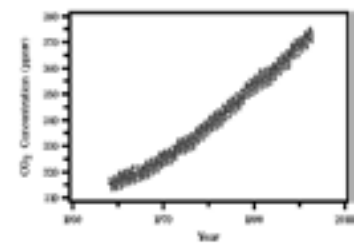
The link between carbon dioxide (CO₂) and the Earth’s surface temperature has been understood since the nineteenth century. French physicist and mathematician Joseph Fourier, studying the energy balance of the Earth, discovered in 1827 that gases in the atmosphere might affect the planet’s surface temperature. Later, the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius investigated the connection in an 1896 paper “On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air Upon the Temperature of the Ground” and coined the term “greenhouse effect.” He combined observations of atmospheric absorption (including infrared observations of the moon done in Pittsburgh at the Allegheny Observatory) with others’ work on carbon emissions from fossil fuels to

predict anthropogenic global warming. And just as we’ve known that lead is hazardous for centuries – but it wasn’t phased out of paint until the 1970’s, and from gasoline until the late 1980’s – despite this early realization, humankind has gone on to extract and burn increasing amounts of fossil fuels (carbon stored hundreds of millions of years ago).

Global atmospheric carbon dioxide measurements taken over the last half-century at Mauna Loa, Hawaii from 1950-2000 show a 17% increase (from about 316 parts per million by volume to about 369 ppmv).

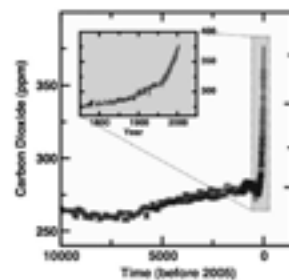
Atmospheric CO₂ measurements from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (1958–2000).

In addition to an overall increase, the measurements show regular seasonal fluctuations in atmospheric CO₂. (Plants are metabolizing carbon dioxide during the summer, and then it is released each winter as autumn leaves decompose).



SOURCE: DAVE KEELING AND TIM WHORF CARBON DIOXIDE INFORMATION ANALYSIS CENTER AT THE SCRIPPS INSTITUTION OF OCEANOGRAPHY.

The longterm evidence for our civilization’s contribution to this increase has been found in ice cores from Vostock, Antarctica, which provide direct records of trapped CO₂ and other greenhouse gas concentrations from 500,000 years ago to the present time.⁴ The records show that both the concentration of CO₂ and its rate of increase have risen to unprecedented levels, coincident with the emergence of modern civilization (beginning around the Industrial Revolution).



Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide over the past 10,000 years and in modern times values are shown in the inset. Data are from ice cores and atmospheric samples.

SOURCE: INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE – FOURTH ASSESSMENT REPORT SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS (FEBRUARY 2007).

These data have been known for twenty years. Even more compelling are direct measurements of current production of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases by the human population by simply living day to day in our homes, our commuting habits, and in our industry. Many factors continue to accelerate our contribution to this production, including the burning of fossil fuels and forests and the melting of permafrost (a source of methane) caused by our warming of the planet.

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A Breath of Fresh Air

The Problem with Carbon Dioxide

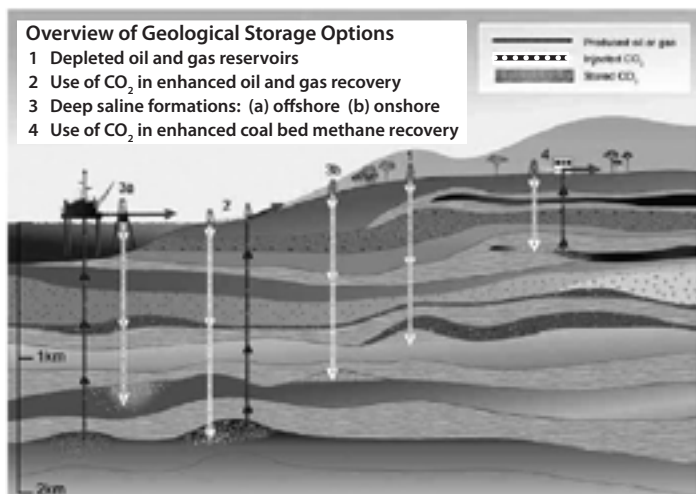
by Mark Kandinsky, GASP member

The GASP Hotline welcomes articles from guest authors in our column, "A Breath of Fresh Air." This column features GASP members and friends sharing insights and writing about their environmental work, in either their personal or professional life. If you would like to submit your own story, please contact the editors at hotline@gasp-pgh.org. Note: The opinions of the author do not necessarily reflect the views of GASP.

Carbon dioxide is a clever little Roadrunner of a pollutant. Our current Wile E. Coyote approach to environmental control will not be effective against it, despite the best Acme devices.

In the past, when we wanted to control a pollutant, we just filtered it out, or reacted it with something, or absorbed it out of the stack gas. The recent Conference on Carbon Capture and Sequestration which took place in Pittsburgh this spring (<http://www.carbonsq.com/>) discussed the ongoing research for technologies to remove carbon dioxide from point-source stack gases, and what to do with it after it is removed. Many of the proposed carbon sequestration solutions have the complexity of an Acme cartoon machine, yet none have the potential to be economically viable.

The theory is that if there is, say, an abandoned oilfield underneath a power plant and carbon dioxide is pumped in under pressure, some of it would react and mineralize to form carbonates and most of the rest would be physically trapped there. And there is a surprising amount of non-solid space underground and undersea to accommodate this: potential reservoirs include depleted oil and gas fields, coal mines, and deep saline aquifers. Scientists calculate that based on the void volumes in the samples they have collected, we could theoretically sequester billions of tons of carbon dioxide underground.



SOURCE: IPCC SPECIAL REPORT ON CARBON DIOXIDE CAPTURE AND STORAGE

The chemical and physical nature of carbon dioxide allows it to slip away from this simple plan. The result is that the theory looks good, but the practice involves large, non-man-made systems that don't comply with theory. Just when we have the best and biggest slingshot ever built, a big rock blocks our path to the roadrunner.


And it's expensive to get around those obstacles. Department of Energy cost estimates for carbon sequestration range from a 50% premium on coal-generated electricity to as much as double or triple the current price.

The Supreme Court has officially classified carbon dioxide as a pollutant, but they cannot make it behave the same as previously regulated pollutants like fine particles, sulfur, nitrogen oxides, metals and mercury. Carbon sequestration is our attempt to deal with carbon dioxide in a traditional "capture and control" manner. But for carbon dioxide we need a different set of tools and a different approach. The best solutions reduce the quantity of fossil fuel combustion, rather than dealing with carbon dioxide after it has been formed.

We cannot stop burning fossil fuel entirely. But there is plenty we can do to reduce combustion, and reduce carbon dioxide formation and release. It will take multiple solutions all acting at once to put a dent in our current greenhouse gas emissions. Energy conservation is the least expensive approach. Wind, solar power, water power and nuclear all have a major role to play. But we will continue to rely on coal for the majority of our power needs for the foreseeable future.

The coal-fired power plants are intimately connected to us, the consumers. We literally demand that they produce power and generate carbon dioxide. Unless we, the consumers, cut back on our usage, the coal-fired power plants are committed to pollute with carbon dioxide. With other pollutants we can demand and pass regulations that require the power plant to reduce its emissions. With this pollutant, we are arguing into a mirror.

What is the best way that we can convince ourselves to lower our consumption of electricity and in this way reduce the carbon dioxide generation of our power plants? The answer to that question is an important part of the solution to the global warming problem.

The Department of Energy is spending \$100 million as a first step in the research for carbon sequestration. Much of the work is being coordinated by the National Energy Technology Laboratory in Pittsburgh/South Hills. It's hard to argue with the scientists who claim that they simply need the right materials to build the slingshot that will catch the Roadrunner. We should certainly continue to fund the carbon sequestration scientists, since they may find a viable partial solution in thirty years. But for the short term, energy conservation is the best alternative we have. 

2nd Worst Air Quality? continued from page 1

Pittsburgh metropolitan area quite as dirty as that found in the Liberty/Clairton area? Certainly not. But, before letting out a sigh of relief, let's not forget that the poor air quality in the Liberty/Clairton area affects a population of about 25,000. Although the air there may not be representative of the entire region, it is an extremely pressing concern for citizens who live and work there.

The air quality in the rest of the region is hardly pristine. According to the American Lung Association, if they omitted the Liberty/Clairton area from the ranking, Allegheny County would *still* place as 22nd worst in the nation, and Pittsburgh as 19th worst metro area in the U.S. That's the 22nd worst ranking out of 718 counties, even while let-

ting all the other counties keep their worst data! The second highest fine-particulate readings in Allegheny County were found in North Braddock, and several other monitors' 3 year averages exceeded the annual standard of 15mcg/m³. These include monitors located in Stowe, Clairton, Harrison, and Lawrenceville. Remember that there was an outpouring of support from the health and environmental community for lowering the annual fine particulate standard to 12mcg/m³ in order to be more protective of human health.

This ranking is a call to action that more must be done to clean up Southwestern Pennsylvania's air NOW. What's happening, and how can you get involved? Here are many ways you can act:

- **The Allegheny County Health Department's Air Quality Program** is developing a plan to control fine particulates in the Liberty/Clairton area. This attainment plan is known as a State Implementation Plan, or SIP, and must be submitted to the EPA by April 5, 2008. You can learn more about it and participate in this effort by attending the Criteria Pollutant Subcommittee meeting of the ACHD's Air Quality Program. These meetings are open to the public.

The next meeting (as of this writing; you can call GASP to confirm closer to the date) is scheduled for September 18th at 9:30 a.m., in the conference room of Building #7, located at 301 39th St. in Lawrenceville.

- **Get involved in GASP's diesel campaign** by encouraging the school district where you live to retrofit their diesel school buses, and by reporting any excessive idling of diesel vehicles to the Allegheny County Health Department (412-687-2243) or your municipal police. More information is available on GASP's website at <http://www.gasp-pgh.org/diesel>.

- **Become a GASP Citizen Smokereader.** The next training will be held in the fall; contact Sue Seppi at 412-325-7382 for more information.

- **Hold your legislators accountable.** Do environmental issues receive a high priority with your representatives?

- **Analyze your own ecological footprint.** Make a personal commitment to reducing your impact on the environment. Be counted in the Rachel Carson Legacy Challenge at <http://www.rachelcarsonhomestead.org>

- **Educate yourself. Be alerted to Air Quality Action Days** by signing up for free real-time air pollution forecasts from the Southwest Pennsylvania Air Quality Partnership. To learn more about the Partnership and register for the email list, go to <http://www.aqpartners.org>

- **GASP Alerts** – if you don't already receive our GASP Alert emails, consider subscribing. You'll receive GASP Alerts roughly every other week with notices of community meetings, educational opportunities, and up-to-date information on issues affecting our region. You can find a link to subscribe on the GASP homepage, <http://www.gasp-pgh.org>

- **Volunteer with GASP** – help us to be better advocates for clean air and a healthy environment.

- **Become a GASP member** – you can contribute via our secure website, by clipping the form on page 11, or by calling the GASP office at 412-325-7382.



Global Warming
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We cannot, unfortunately, rely on mother nature to reverse our injections. Eventually the CO₂ we put into the atmosphere will be sequestered into oceans of the earth as calcium carbonate. The lagtime for this natural process is measured in thousands of years. It is clearly our minimum responsibility to reduce our emissions.

GASP members will be very familiar with the actions we as individuals can take to reduce our carbon footprints. We can reduce our energy consumption by using fluorescent bulbs, using public transportation, telecommuting; turning off our computers (dead CPU time is a major energy sink), buying late-model (fuel-efficient) cars, checking the air in our tires, multitasking on automobile trips, buying organic and buying locally, buying high-rated energy-star appliances, planting a tree each year... the complete list is much more extensive. As a population, we can also work with our governments to pass legislation to provide tax breaks to renewable energy suppliers and perhaps to companies that consume renewable energy; we can pass legislation requiring our governments to consume only electricity generated with renewable resources (wind, solar, geothermal, hydroelectric including tidal).

We should require of ourselves to capture methane and CO₂ from all centralized sources. We can pass legislation requiring CO₂ producers to handle their CO₂ waste appropriately, by injecting it, for example, into porous rock under the earth's surface (more on this technique in A Breath of Fresh Air, on page 7 of this newsletter).

We can also use the methane from landfills to generate electricity. We should see massive public work projects to create a renewable energy grid, driven by a determination of the optimal blend of locally produced and consumed renewable energy.

The good news is that we have awakened to our global responsibilities, and many of us have consciously altered our lifestyles and habits. In our region, we used to be able to consume renewable-derived electricity from our power company (by purchasing renewable energy credits from Green Mountain Energy⁵). Green Mountain has left the Pennsylvania market, but now Community Energy, which puts electricity consumers' dollars toward new wind capacity. They can be found on the web at


<http://newwindenergy.com/>



Note: If you'd like to read more about global climate change, the science behind it and the uncertainties that remain, the August 2007 issue of Scientific American has a comprehensive review article on the topic.

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Coexisting - McKeesport and the CSX Rail Yard

by Sue Seppi, GASP Program Manager

Over the last few years, GASP has received many complaints from residents living above the CSX switchyard in McKeesport concerning emissions, malodors, noise, and recently light pollution from the facility. GASP did some air monitoring in the area above the switchyard last year and found unhealthy levels of fine particulate matter over extended periods on several occasions. A door-to-door survey found that most residents above the rail yard are concerned about these problems.

With these results, GASP asked for a meeting between CSX and affected residents. Two such meetings have taken place at the Highland Grove United Methodist Church in McKeesport, this April and July. Other participants included representatives from the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD), a staff member from State Representative Marc Gergely's office, and members of GASP.

Local resident Ron Oleska played a video taken from his property near the switchyard showing emissions from train idling. Citizens had a chance to voice concerns about the rail yard, and several different issues were raised:

Emissions and Malodors

Neighbors spoke about diesel emissions from the trains, which are known to be hazardous to human health, and are associated with heart disease, cancer, asthma and other respiratory conditions. Malodors are of concern as well. This ultimately led to a discussion of idling.

CSX representative Terry Ludban said that there should be little locomotive idling when the temperature is above 40 degrees. Exceptions might occur when a switcher locomotive has a dead battery or a bad auxiliary power unit (APU). He felt this would not happen more than one to two times per month. A resident asked if, in that circumstance, the train could be moved down the track to a brownfield area in less residential surroundings, or turned off and later jump-started. Mr. Ludban explained that it would take some time to bring in another train capable of jumping the problem locomotive, and said he was not sure about moving the train elsewhere.

Jim Thompson of the ACHD inquired as to whether the locomotives have a "black box" that records idling times (they do) and suggested that downloading this information would be helpful to understanding how much idling was occurring. Mr. Thompson further explained that the ACHD does not have jurisdiction over mobile sources of pollution, but that a switchyard would fall under the category of a stationary source. Thus, the Health Department can regulate for such things as malodors and fugitive emissions (though a recent court decision in California may make this regulatory control less valid).



Light pollution

Ron Oleska had concerns about a type of globe lights recently installed at the train yard for the safety of people working in the yard around the clock. The light poles are quite high, and the globe lights shoot light into neighboring houses. He requested that downward-directed lights replace the globe lights. Mr. Ludban agreed to look into that possibility.

Further monitoring

Air monitoring was done at some houses neighboring the rail yard (but not at those nearest the yard) by consultants for CSX. The results did not indicate excessive emissions or noise. Jim Thompson from ACHD plans to do further monitoring of the rail yard, including sites at homes located closest to the yard.

Opening lines of communication

After some discussion, Mr. Ludban directed the group to a toll-free number at CSX where citizens can express concerns. This number is 1-800-232-0144.

Trish Gillespie of Representative Marc Gergely's office asked that any calls of concern to that CSX number be reported to Rep. Gergely's office as well, at 412-754-3500. The ACHD number to report a complaint about air quality is 412-687-2243.

Mr. Ludban further remarked that CSX has increased fuel efficiency considerably since 1980, has installed 900 auxiliary power units (among the fleet of 1400 switcher locomotives), and has spent \$1 billion on low-emission locomotives. APUs are typically used during cold weather; they have small diesel engines to maintain battery power and engine heat, and are used to avoid idling the train engine for those purposes.

The third meeting of this group is scheduled for November 14th at 6 pm. This is an open meeting – all neighbors are welcome, and will have an opportunity to raise questions and voice concerns.



Spotlight on the GASP Staff

Rachel Filippini is GASP's Executive Director, and has served in that position since 2004. She's been a GASP staffer since 2001, previously serving as Executive Assistant and as Program Coordinator for the GASPer Air Monitor Program.



PHOTO: DIANE CHILTON

Rachel has been curious and passionate about the natural environment ever since her childhood. Inspired by a mother who always encouraged outdoor exploration and a father who dragged her along to township recycling meetings, what else could she do but become an environmentalist? Rachel knew she had a taste for environmental advocacy when she took on the subject

of animal rights in a government class during her senior year of high school. Her poster depicting cosmetics testing on rabbits stirred some controversy and a little teasing from classmates, but that didn't concern her too much. She went on to jobs as a nature camp counselor and as an instructor with CitiParks' Nature in Your Neighborhood program.


Rachel received her degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. While attending Pitt, Rachel volunteered with the Hand-in-Hand Festival for children with special needs, coordinating fun activities at their annual event and recruiting volunteers for personal interactions with the children. Following college, Rachel worked for two years with AmeriCorps, serving as the Education Coordinator for the Community Lead Education and Reduction Corps in Pittsburgh. In this position she helped develop educational materials about lead poisoning prevention and provided public education for families, children and the general community.

Rachel continues to educate herself on a variety of children's nature education and sustainability topics. She's currently putting her years of educational experience to use developing a course for children about the importance of nature and how to be good stewards of the earth.

Rachel says of her time at GASP, "This experience is truly rewarding and I can honestly say that the work of GASP is making a positive impact on Pittsburgh's environment."

Among other duties, Rachel is responsible for implementing key campaigns, such as the Allegheny County Partnership to Reduce Diesel Pollution, assisting with the planning of events, fundraising, tracking the progress of meeting the short and long-term goals of GASP, and representing GASP at public events.

Rachel recently joined the board of Pittsburgh Region Clean Cities. She's also interested in getting more involved in environmental and sustainability issues in Armstrong County, where she resides with her husband Brian, their two-year-old daughter, and two dogs.

When not working or volunteering, Rachel enjoys reading, photography, gardening, and hiking. But she spends most of her free time with her daughter, who gives her a different perspective: "As a new mom, I am even more keenly aware of the need to protect the earth for future generations." 

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Save the Date for GASP's Fall Party!

Friday, November 2nd, 7:00 pm at Khalil's Restaurant in Oakland. Be on the lookout for your invitation!

Drive Cleaner Drive Greener
continued from page 8



PHOTO: LORI NADLE

**GASP President Jonathan Nadle
inspecting the interior of the SMART Car**

In addition to the May 19th event at the Venture Outdoors Festival, GASP conducted two additional Drive Cleaner Drive Greener events on Earth Day, at the Carnegie Science Center and the Westmoreland County Earth Day Festival at St. Vincent College.



PHOTO: JONATHAN NADLE

Fossil Free Fuels vehicle that runs on waste vegetable oil

Special thanks go to Venture Outdoors, the Carnegie Science Center, St. Vincent College, Rohrich Toyota, Ferrante Motor Cars, Shults Ford, Fossil Free Fuels, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and all of the individuals who volunteered to display their hybrids and alternative-fuel vehicles. We hope to see you all for next year's DCDG events. In the meantime, drive clean and drive green!



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