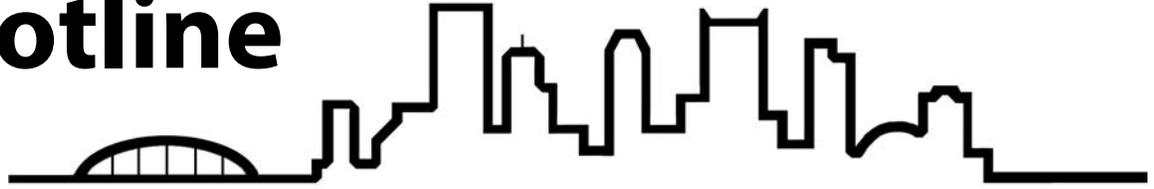




# Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc. Hotline



Spring 2019

[www.gasp-pgh.org](http://www.gasp-pgh.org)

## In this issue

Pittsburgh Announces First Clean Construction Project	1
Michelle Madoff Award of Environmental Excellence	1
Remembering Walter Goldberg, 1927-2018	2
Clairton Coke Works: GASP's Testimony	3
GASP's 50 Years of Legal Work	6
GASP Board Member Honored with Carnegie Science Award	6
Air Quality 101: Smell Something? Say Something!	7
Cancer Symposium Highlights Role of the Environment	8
Rethinking Wood Smoke	9
Air Adventures: GASP Summer Camp	10
GASP's Air Quality Kits	10
Spotlight on a Staff Member	11
GASP's 50th Anniversary	12

## Pittsburgh Announces First Clean Construction Project

by Rachel Filippini, GASP Executive Director

It took significantly longer than we had hoped it would, but we are happy to report that the city of Pittsburgh has finally announced the first project to include city required clean construction specifications. In late February, Mayor William Peduto and the City's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI) held a press event announcing that the reconstruction of the McFarren Street Bridge over Nine Mile Run would be the first clean construction project. The guidelines require all city government construction projects costing \$2.5 million and above to use diesel emission control strategies on



GASP Director Rachel Filippini speaks at the press event announcing the first clean construction project in Pittsburgh.

continued on page 5

## Seeking Nominations for the Michelle Madoff Award of Environmental Excellence

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.

The Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP) has a legacy of strong women, with many serving as board members, staff members, and spokeswomen throughout the history of our organization. At our upcoming 50th Anniversary Celebration on October 12, we'd like to celebrate contemporary women in environmental fields while commemorating Michelle Madoff, our co-founder and first president.

This is where you come in: GASP will soon be seeking nominations for outstanding women in the fields of business, community organizing, education, media, and medicine to each receive the Michelle Madoff Award of Environmental Excellence. These awards will be presented to women who are currently working to improve the environment of southwestern Pennsylvania—check our website at [gasp-pgh.org](http://gasp-pgh.org) for more details coming soon!



# Remembering Walter Goldberg, 1927-2018

by Jonathan Nadle, GASP President

We are saddened to report that one of GASP's founders, Walter Golburg, passed away on Nov 18, 2018, at the age of 91.

Walter was professor emeritus of Physics at Pitt, where he enjoyed a long and accomplished academic career. But he also was extraordinary in his civic and environmental activism, with a passion for cleaning up our region's air. He served twice as GASP President, as well as sat on Allegheny County's Air Pollution Control Advisory Committee and the Pennsylvania DEP's Air Quality Technical Advisory Committee.

The GASP board presented Walter with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the fall 2016 annual event and in the spring of 2017 conferred on him a special board member emeritus position.

Walter played a pivotal role in GASP's founding and history and it's literally accurate to say that Pittsburghers breathe easier today due to his efforts.

He went about his work with kindness and humor, as well as respect for others and integrity. After his retirement from the board, whenever a particularly thorny issue would arise, we'd ask ourselves "What would Walter do?" We considered him to be our moral compass. I suspect we will continue to ask that question well into the future. 



The **Hotline** is the semiannual newsletter of the Group Against Smog and Pollution.

GASP (412) 924-0604  
1133 S. Braddock Ave., Suite 1A www.gasp-pgh.org  
Pittsburgh, PA 15218 info@gasp-pgh.org



### GASP Mission Statement

The Group Against Smog and Pollution works to improve air quality to protect human, environmental, and economic health in southwestern Pennsylvania.

### GASP Vision

GASP envisions a Southwestern Pennsylvania where the air we breathe supports human, environmental, and economic health and where:

- Every citizen can breathe cleaner air, which at a minimum meets federal health-based standards and is no longer listed as one of the top 10 most polluted areas in the United States.
- Regional data will show over time that citizens have less prevalence of diseases and conditions that are proven to be linked to air pollution.
- Citizens understand the health implications of polluted air and appreciate that clean air is imperative not only to good health but also to both a healthy environment and a healthy economy and where they hold policymakers accountable for regional air quality.
- Policymakers consider new development through an "air quality lens."
- All regional businesses comply with their air quality permits. In the cases where they are not complying, regulatory agencies take swift action to stop violations of air quality permits and regulations.

### GASP Staff

Rachel Filippini	Executive Director
John Baillie	Staff Attorney
Amanda Gillooly	Communications Manager
Chelsea Hilty	Education and Events Coordinator
Kathy Lawson	Office Manager
Ned Mulcahy	Staff Attorney
Suzanne Seppi	Project Manager

### GASP Board of Directors

Maren Cooke, PhD	Frances Harkins
Zelda Curtiss	Janis Johnson
Roger Day	Jonathan Nadle
David Eibling, MD	Abby Resnick
James Fabisiak, PhD	Harold Rickenbacker
Marla Ferrency	Kate St. John
Karen Grzywinski	Peri Unligil, MD

# Clairton Coke Works: GASP's Testimony

by Rachel Filippini, GASP Executive Director

Remarks for Public Testimony

Joint PA Senate and House Democratic Policy Committee

Hearing on US Steel Clairton Coke Works Explosion, Air Quality, and Community Notification Issues

February 7, 2019

Dear Chair Boscola and Distinguished Members of the Pennsylvania Senate and House:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this joint Senate-House Democratic Policy Committee hearing. My name is Rachel Filippini and I am the executive director of the Group Against Smog and Pollution.

For fifty years we've worked through education and advocacy to improve air quality throughout southwestern Pennsylvania. For fifty years, U.S. Steel's Clairton Coke and Edgar Thomson facilities have been part of – or *the* cause of – air quality problems in our region. Their chronic failure to comply with health-based air quality regulations has burdened the residents of the Mon Valley and beyond. The Christmas Eve fire at Clairton Coke is just the latest in a long line of insults to the community.

While a part of today's discussion should be about the fire at Clairton Coke and how to ensure the community is better-informed and protected should such an incident occur in the future, I believe the discussion needs to focus on US Steel's air pollution problems and the devastating health consequences the Mon Valley community has experienced for decades.

The anger and frustration you are hearing from your constituents – and reading about in the newspaper and on social media – is not just about the fire, the poor air quality it created, and the initial lack of information provided to the public. This anger, anxiety, and frustration are the results of residents enduring decades of air pollution while seeing enforcement of law that has – to date – proven ineffective.

While some industries struggle with compliance from time to time, the County Health Department, EPA, and US Steel have been engaged in court battles or settlement negotiations continually for the past 48 years. Major settlements with US Steel occurred in 1979, 1993, 2007, 2008, 2014, and 2016. According to the ACHD, after the 2016 judgement, emissions from the plant actually got worse. Overall compliance with local air laws declined from 94% in 2014 to just 75% last year. What would happen if everyone obeyed red lights 75% of the time?

In a 60-day notice to sue Clairton in 2016, the environmental organization Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future documented that Clairton Coke Works had over 6,700 air pollution violations between January 1, 2012 and May 31, 2015. That's an average of over five times a day, every day for nearly three and a half years.

According to the ACHD June 2018 Enforcement Order against U.S. Steel,<sup>1</sup> in addition to its decreased rate of compliance, U.S. Steel employees were actually taking actions that skew or disrupt inspectors' observations. Specifically, the U.S. Steel employees were walking in front of inspectors and applying a mud-like mixture to emission points so they could obscure the emissions. ACHD inspectors also observed partial pushing of coke from ovens to avoid the potential violations otherwise associated with a complete pushing of coke. ACHD inspectors also observed the removal of flue caps thereby diverting emissions that would have otherwise traveled to the combustion stack, where the emissions are monitored. By removing the flue caps in this manner, U.S. Steel effectively avoided violations attributable to stack emissions. ACHD inspectors also observed offtake pipe caps being cracked open on a sealed oven. By doing so, emissions that would have been released by the door areas are diverted away from inspectors conducting a door inspection; thereby avoiding potential door inspection violations.



Left to right: Ashleigh Deemer (PennEnvironment), Rachel Filippini (GASP), Dr. Deborah Gentile (Pediatric Alliance), and Matt Mehalik (Breathe Project) testified at the February 7 hearing about US Steel's Clairton Coke Works.

continued on page 4

## Clairton Coke Works continued from page 3

These are not actions taken by a company trying to be a good neighbor, by a company trying to do better. These are actions taken by a company trying to deceive our regulators. These are actions taken by company that has a total disregard for the community where they operate.

U.S. Steel's troubles extend beyond the Clairton Coke Works. In November of 2017, the Health Department and the federal Environmental Protection Agency issued a joint Notice of Violation against US Steel's Edgar Thompson Works and now the US Department of Justice is also involved.

Over and over and over again U.S. Steel breaks the law and it is the community that suffers. They suffer by way of asthma attacks, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, and premature death. According to the Center for Healthy Environments and Communities at the University of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County ranks in the top 2% of counties in the U.S. for cancer risk from air pollution.<sup>2</sup> The two census tracts with the highest cancer risk are located in or near Clairton and reflect the contribution from the nearby U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Works and other facilities.<sup>3</sup> When EPA first determined that coke oven gas was a carcinogen, its 1984 Assessment of Coke Oven Emissions relied heavily on research of high mortality rates for coke oven workers in Allegheny County.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the mortality caused by air pollution, I want to be sure you understand the daily burden and ill-effects caused by air pollution. Most often our immediate interactions with the air are through our noses. Even when the skies look clean, our noses can tell there is a problem because of foul smells. There have been, for instance, over 740 air quality complaints via the SmellPGH app from February 2nd to February 5th, that is nearly 200/day. A frequent complaint we hear is the over-powering smell of rotten eggs, or hydrogen sulfide ( $H_2S$ ). U.S. Steel's Clairton Coke Works is by far the largest emitter of  $H_2S$  in the county, emitting more than 109 tons in 2017.<sup>5</sup> GASP documented that the state standard for  $H_2S$  has been violated fifty times a year on average over the past six years at the Liberty Borough monitor in the Mon Valley. Just this past weekend, the 24-hour average  $H_2S$  readings spiked to 22 ppb; that is more than 4 times the standard of 5 ppb. These noxious odors disrupt sleep; discourage people from spending time outdoors; can irritate the eyes, nose, and throat; and generally, make life extremely unpleasant.

I'm sure you have all noticed the recent spate of extremely poor air quality days. The ACHD has been doing a better job in the last month informing the public about poor air dispersion days. These are days when air pollution does not easily disperse allowing fine particulates, sulfur dioxide, and other hazardous air pollutants to remain trapped closer to the ground for extended periods of time. On these poor air quality days, people, especially those with asthma or other chronic respiratory or cardiac conditions are told to take extra precaution and limit outdoor activity. The burden of protection should not fall exclusively on the public. These days are predicted in advance, so what steps can industry take to limit their impact? Can coking times be extended, for instance during low dispersion days?

We believe that ACHD must do a better job of holding U.S. Steel accountable, but so too must our local and state leaders.

For the state leaders in attendance today:

1. I concur with Dr. Gentile that, "an efficient and effective protocol must be developed to ensure that the public is made aware in a timely manner of both acute threats to public health and specific, appropriate actions to undertake to ensure protection of their health."
2. Require a full accounting of the cause of the fire and steps US Steel will take to ensure something similar will not happen in the future.
3. Empower the Health Department to be a strong enforcement agency and ensure that they are taking all steps necessary to protect public health. The health department's charge is to protect, promote, and preserve the health and well-being of all Allegheny County residents, particularly the most vulnerable. Support them when they take strong enforcement action against any polluter and call them out when they do not.
4. If the laws on the books aren't strong enough to protect public health then do your part to help strengthen them.



**A resident expresses distrust regarding the pollution emitted by US Steel's Clairton Coke Works.**

continued on page 5

## Clean Construction continued from page 1

both on-road construction vehicles and off-road equipment, including the use of ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel. As most of you will recall, GASP has long championed the legislation and we were invited to speak at the press conference as well.

The Clean Construction guidelines were introduced by then City Councilman William Peduto in 2011 and then revised in 2016 to make them easier for all stakeholders (including contractors and those charged with enforcing the legislation) to follow.

DOMI reports that a new steel girder bridge will be constructed to provide access to the Duck Hollow neighborhood. The bridge will carry two lanes of traffic, with a sidewalk on one side. The new bridge will connect Old Browns Hill Road with McFarren Street, upstream of the existing Second Avenue Bridge and the CSX Railroad Bridge. The new bridge will replace the existing Second Avenue Bridge which has an 11 ton weight restriction. Access to the neighborhood will be maintained throughout construction. Construction is expected to begin in May and is expected to be complete in the summer of 2020.

### Why are reducing diesel emissions important?

Diesel particulate matter poses one of the greatest cancer risks from any toxic outdoor air pollutant in the region. In addition to causing cancer, diesel emissions cause asthma, heart attacks, strokes, reduced brain function, and diabetes.

The young, old, and those with preexisting heart or lung diseases are especially vulnerable to air pollution, but construction workers receive the most potent dose of toxic diesel emissions, as they work around the equipment each day.

According to the National Emissions Inventory, diesel-powered construction and mining equipment emitted over 130 tons of fine particulate matter in 2014 in Allegheny County. That amounts to approximately 27% of all fine particulate matter produced in Allegheny County in 2014 by all mobile diesel-powered sources and two-thirds of fine particulate matter produced by all mobile non-road diesel equipment.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond being a public health risk, the black carbon found in diesel pollution is a potent global warming agent. Minimizing black carbon is directly in line with Pittsburgh's climate action plan.

While we are pleased that the City's clean construction implementation is finally a reality, we acknowledge that because it only applies to city-funded projects, it has a limited impact. In order to get a bigger bang, we will need authorities, like the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority, which undertake considerably more construction activity than the City, to adopt a similar policy. In addition, more institutions, such as local universities, should follow Chatham University and UPMC's example and pass their own policies. Using clean construction equipment needs to become the norm and not the exception.

1. Construction sites and activities likely contribute more fine particulate matter because this figure does not take into account "industrial equipment" such as aerial lifts, "commercial equipment" such as generators, or any of the on-road diesel vehicles such as dump trucks and tractor-trailers needed to deliver the heavy equipment to the site.



---

## Clairton Coke Works continued from page 4

5. Ensure your local offices are equipped to handle community concerns; meaning, if your constituents call with an air quality concern, you and your staff know how to help them.
6. Industry lobbyists have the time and resources to visit their government officials. In general, the public does not. Make sure you have or seek out information on all sides of an issue including the public health and environmental impacts.

Eventually the damage from the fire will be fixed and the plant will be back up and running as it has in the past. I hope you will remain as interested in improving air quality in Allegheny County in six months, one year, five years from now as you are today.

There is a lot to love about the Pittsburgh region. We have top-rated universities, world-class health care, abundant cultural and natural amenities, and winning sports teams. Unfortunately, air quality is not something Pittsburghers love or brag about. Let's attack our air pollution problem like we would any other public health threat.

1. <https://tinyurl.com/ACHD180601>

2. <https://tinyurl.com/chec-PRETA>

3. Ibid

4. US EPA, "Carcinogen Assessment of Coke Oven Emissions," EPA/600/6-82/003F (NTIS PB84170182), 1982. <https://tinyurl.com/EPA-cokeoven>. Research of Allegheny County coke workers discussed extensively in "Epidemiologic Studies" section of Chapter VI.

5. A Department of Environmental Protection's eFACTS online data portal



# GASP's 50 Years of Legal Work

by Ned Mulcahy, GASP Staff Attorney

Rick Middleton, attorney and founder of the Southern Environmental Law Center, was quoted extensively in a recent article in *The Guardian* concerning environmental justice. When discussing his early efforts working on air quality, he noted, “[a]dvocacy is essential ... but you cannot succeed at environmental protection without lawyers, especially when you’re up against political power and resources.”

In its fifty-year existence, GASP undoubtedly has been up against political power and resources. Accordingly, throughout its fifty-year existence, GASP has sought to use lawyers and the legal system as part of its strategy for cleaning up our region’s air. GASP now has two attorneys on staff full-time, but access to legal advice wasn’t always as easy as walking down the hall.

When GASP started in 1969 and for many years thereafter, GASP was a volunteer-based organization with no paid staff. Creative use of limited resources spawned our mascot Dirty Gertie the Poor Polluted Birdie and her televised PSAs. There were cookie cookbook fundraising events and small education campaigns. But there was a legal edge as well. In 1973, Arthur R. Gorr, Chairman of GASP’s Legal Committee, wrote a letter to the Allegheny County Board of Commissioners expressing GASP’s outrage at a case where U.S. Steel was found to have violated a Consent Order but the judge did not impose a fine: “With sincere respect for the Court we must assert that the judge’s

conclusions are legally incorrect.”

In 1980, GASP went to court. Robert Yuhnke, an attorney from Chicago, Estelle Comay, an attorney in Pittsburgh, and Ed Gerjuoy, attorney and GASP board member (2001-2004, 2010-2014), represented GASP in an attempt to intervene in an ongoing case between the EPA and U.S. Steel. At the time, the Court noted it had “uncovered no case in the United States Supreme Court or in the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit which interprets” the Clean Air Act’s provision allowing intervention. GASP was breaking new ground. Ultimately, the Court did not grant GASP the right to participate in negotiations as a full party but was “made an intervenor in the Court’s records” and was allowed to brief issues, file formal objections, and call witnesses among other means of staying involved in the case.

Since then, GASP has continued to engage in legal actions--more than this article could summarize--using both volunteer and paid attorneys, of which there are too many to mention in one article. The point is that without tireless contributions from these attorneys over the past fifty years, GASP would not have been as effective in its efforts to protect our environment. Prior attorneys representing GASP have been my law school professors, mentors, and close friends. In one case, they are even opposing counsel. I admire them all and want to thank them for their hard work, precedents, lessons, and contributions to GASP’s good work. ♻️

## GASP Board Member Honored with Carnegie Science Award

Congratulations are in order for GASP board member Harold Rickenbacker, who will be honored in May with a Carnegie Science Award. Carnegie Science Award winners are selected by a committee of peers—both past awardees and industry leaders—who rigorously reviewed more than 200 nominations and selected the most deserving scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs, communicators, educators, and students whose contributions have led to significant economic or societal benefit in western Pennsylvania.

Rickenbacker, of the Swanson School Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation at the University of Pittsburgh, is being lauded for his work addressing indoor and ambient air quality in under-served Pittsburgh neighborhoods. While pursuing his PhD at Pitt, Rickenbacker “integrated engineering and environmental justice” through an initiative in Pittsburgh’s East End called the Environmental Justice Community Alert Matrix.

Read more about Harold’s work on the GASP website: [gasp-pgh.org](http://gasp-pgh.org)

## Welcome Amanda!

Amanda Gillooly was hired in February 2019 to serve as GASP’s communications manager. She is an award-winning journalist who has written for myriad news organizations in western Pennsylvania. Most recently, she served as a writer and social media specialist for several Pittsburgh law firms, and was previously the public relations specialist at Canon-McMillan School District.

We are pleased to have Amanda on the GASP staff, and look forward to sharing more about Amanda in the "Spotlight on a Staff Member" feature in the next issue of the *Hotline*. In the meantime, be sure to follow GASP on social media and subscribe to the GASPAlerts mailing list to see her work.

# Air Quality 101: Smell Something? Say Something!

by Amanda Gillooly, GASP Communications Manager

Take a deep breath. Smell something acrid or chemical? How about the odor of rotten eggs? Then report it!

While the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (more commonly referred to as DEP) regulates air quality in the Keystone State, Allegheny and Philadelphia Counties do things a little differently. Instead of being regulated by DEP, air quality issues are instead handled by local regulatory agencies. Here in Allegheny County, air quality is regulated by the Allegheny County Health Department (sometimes called ACHD for short).

This means that if you live within Allegheny County and you smell a foul odor, you may report it by contacting the ACHD. To report a foul odor you can call 412-687-ACHD, or you can file a complaint online.\*

Folks in Allegheny County may also utilize an app developed by the CREATE Lab at Carnegie Mellon University known as Smell PGH to report a foul odor to the health department. When you utilize the app—which crowdsources smell reports so they can track how pollutants travel through the air across the city—it sends your complaint directly to the ACHD. The app also allows users to see a map containing the locations of all other foul odors complaints lodged that day.\*

Live outside of Allegheny County? Foul odors outside the county need to be reported to DEP. You can do this by calling 412-442-4184, or you may file a complaint online.\*

Pro tip: When filing a foul odor report with either the Allegheny County Health Department or DEP, remember: The devil is in the details! Please be as specific as possible. Remember to include key information such as:

- The time you noticed the odor
- Your location (both neighborhood and zip code, please!)
- A brief description of the odor or smoke

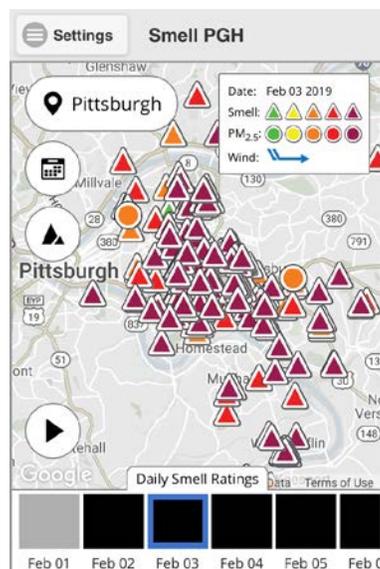
Please know that while reporting foul odors to environmental regulators is a great first step, there are other things you can do to make your voice heard on air quality issues.

The second and third calls after your initial air quality complaint should be to your representatives in the state House and Senate. Not sure who represents you? No worries. Visit the Pennsylvania General Assembly website,\* type in your address, and it will give you the contact information on your state representative and senator.

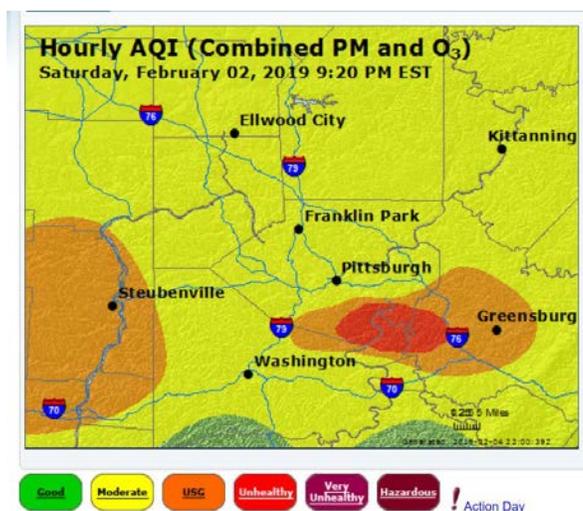
\* links to these websites can be found on the GASP website at <https://tinyurl.com/airquality101>

## February 2019 Poor Air Quality

Residents of the greater Pittsburgh area experienced noticeably poor air quality on many days in early 2019. In addition to increased pollutant levels due to the lack of pollution controls at US Steel's Clairton Coke Works following a fire in the facility, several temperature inversions trapped the pollution at ground level.



Hundreds of "as bad as it gets" reports were made to the Smell PGH app in February 2019.



Pollution episodes were rated "Unhealthy" in the Clairton area on February 2-7, 2019, as shown on this map from US EPA. The shaded area between Washington and Greensburg is rated "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" while the darker area within that is "Unhealthy" meaning that all members of the public may begin to experience health effects and members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects. The Liberty/Clairton monitor ranked Pittsburgh as the most polluted in the nation on February 3 at 7am. You too can view current air quality conditions by visiting [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov).

# Cancer Symposium Highlights Role of the Environment

by Jim Fabisiak, GASP Board Member

Although science has led to major advancements in the treatment of cancer, the debate continues on “why” people get cancer in the first place. Some say it’s all in our genes, others blame one’s lifestyle choices, and some just chalk it up to bad luck. On January 29, 2019, a day-long symposium was held at Phipps Conservatory entitled “Cancer and the Environment: Priorities for Research, Policy, and Clinical Practice.” The meeting, organized by Dr. Polly Hoppin and Molly Jacobs from the Center for Sustainable Development at University of Massachusetts at Lowell, was co-sponsored by UPMC Hillman Cancer Center, University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health, and several other organizations. The diverse meeting brought together scientists, health care professionals, and community leaders, as well as concerned citizens to exchange data and discuss the impact of exposures to a multitude of environmental agents on the origin and development of cancer. These ubiquitous chemicals can be found in the air we breathe, the food we eat, and water we drink. We encounter them in our homes, our workplaces, our schools and our neighborhoods. There were more than ten expert presentations throughout the day that highlighted what we know about cancer incidence and prevalence trends, as well the science behind linking specific modifiable chemical risk factors like air pollution to cancer, and the benefit of reducing those risks.

To just mention a few of the points made, Dr. Mary White, Chief of Epidemiology and Applied Research at the Centers of Disease Control illustrated how, despite marked improvements in cancer survival, the same success is not



Left to right: Matt Mehalik (Breathe Project), Anita Prizio (Allegheny County Council), Fred Brown (The Forbes Funds), Linda Robertson (Pitt Public Health & UPMC Hillman Cancer Center), and Patty Opresko (Pitt Public Health & UPMC Hillman Cancer Center) on the panel of regional leaders discussing recommendations and action steps at the conclusion of the Cancer and the Environment Symposium.

seen in the number of people who get cancer, and many types of cancer such as thyroid, liver, breast, and melanoma are presently on the rise. The audience heard evidence from Dr. Mark Miller, University of California at San Francisco, that linked childhood leukemia to multiple everyday (and avoidable) environmental exposures. Dr. David Kriebel, University of Massachusetts Lowell, presented a novel analysis for estimating rates of smoking-related cancers that would remain if smoking were eliminated in the population and showed that significant numbers of these cancers would still be observed and would be higher in some areas than in others, implying a role of other environmental factors like pollution. Dr. Jim Fabisiak, Associate Director for the Center for Healthy Environments and Communities at Pitt Public Health (and GASP board member), highlighted the fact that in Allegheny County, risk and rates of several types of cancer associated with air pollution exceed national averages. After pointing to examples of multiple cancer causing agents, like radon and smoking, that, when present together, potentially amplify risk above that predicted by simple additive effects, Dr. Fabisiak also went on to introduce the concept of “personalized prevention.” This essentially borrows from the recently popular concept of individualized medicine and suggests that each of us has a unique set of environmental risk factors for cancer, and therefore, strategies to reduce each individual’s risk of cancer are not “one size fits all,” and instead should be tailored to one’s own set of circumstances. Dr. Jamil Bey with UrbanKind Institute

continued on page 9



Left to right: Speakers Shaina Stacy (UPMC Hillman Cancer Institute), Robin Dobson (Silent Spring Institute), and Jim Fabisiak (Center for Healthy Environments and Communities, Pitt Public Health) and moderator Richard Clapp field questions from the audience after their presentations at the Cancer and the Environment Symposium.

# Rethinking Wood Smoke

by Sue Seppi, GASP Project Manager

It is common knowledge that cigarette smoke, a billowing dark plume of industrial smoke or forest fire smoke is unhealthy to breathe. What doesn't seem to register to the general public is that breathing smoke from residential wood burning is also unhealthy.

Consider this:

1. Wood smoke contains very fine particles that are small enough to reach deep into the lungs. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, "fine particles can trigger heart attacks, stroke, irregular heart rhythms, and heart failure, especially in people who are already at risk for these conditions. Fine particles can (also) make asthma symptoms worse and trigger asthma attacks."
2. "Wood smoke contains dozens of air toxics"<sup>1</sup> including known human carcinogens, benzene and formaldehyde.<sup>2</sup>
3. Cigarette smoking inside or even outside is against the law in many places because of the adverse health impacts of second-hand smoke. But most of us don't think twice about burning wood in backyard fire pits, indoor fireplaces or wood stoves. Perhaps out of tradition, wood burning remains legal in many urban counties/municipalities including Allegheny County. This despite the fact that wood smoke can adversely affect the health of one's family--and what about the neighbors? "There is no practical way to prevent wood smoke pollution from seeping into nearby homes."<sup>3</sup> Most wood smoke particles are so tiny they behave like gases.<sup>4</sup>

Note the following difficult experience of one Allegheny County resident:

When I first started smelling wood smoke in my community about ten years ago I thought there must've been

an unusually high number of house fires that summer. As the burning seemed to get more frequent and closer to my home I couldn't leave my windows open anymore. I couldn't go out and do yard work, or sit on my porch like I used to, without getting sick. When I saw some young people sitting around a campfire up the street from me, one young woman suggested I get some inhalers for asthma, like she uses! I don't have asthma but smoke gives me headaches, a sore throat and other symptoms. Our town fire marshal explained that he couldn't help me without there being a proper municipal ordinance for him to enforce. I went to council meetings to ask for help and I tried writing letters to the editor of our local weekly paper. The result I got was not help but political enmity and neighborhood division. I finally had to sell my paid-off house at a loss and take on another mortgage at almost sixty years old in an effort to get away. Despite making inquiries before buying another house, it turns out there is burning in my present neighborhood too. The current cultural craze of wood burning is totally unnecessary and unacceptable in our already polluted urban environment.

1. Allegheny County Health Department, *When You Make a Fire*, <https://tinyurl.com/ACHD-makeafire>, accessed 03/07/2019
2. National Toxicology Program, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *14th Report on Carcinogens*, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/NTP-carcinogens>, accessed 02/22/2019
3. Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment, Public Comments to Environmental Protection Agency, Re: Standards of Performance for New Residential Wood Heaters, New Residential Hydronic Heaters and Forced-Air Furnaces, and New Residential Masonry Heaters (comment deadline May 5, 2014). Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2009-0734, p. 3 <https://tinyurl.com/UPHE-wood>, accessed on 2/20/2019
4. Ibid, p. 3 

## Cancer Symposium continued from page 8

reminded the attendees that frequently, these environmental risks and their outcomes are not equitably distributed across racial and economic divides.

The meeting was also unique in that it culminated in a session featuring a panel of regional leaders from diverse fields including environmental advocacy, social justice, policy and regulation, health care, and scientific research who engaged in a conversation that attempted to integrate all these sectors toward a unified set of recommendations and actions. While progress was made, relationships formed, and commitments to future discussions were voiced, it must be remembered that "Rome was not built in a day." Specific

policies and actions will certainly take time to develop and implement. It will be critical to keep the conversation flowing. Nonetheless, we should take heart in the fact that the medical community is now beginning to acknowledge that cancer prevention strategies must come to include not only behavioral risk factors like smoking and exercise, but also the host of pervasive environmental risk factors including chemicals in our air, water, food, and consumer products.

A detailed summary of the meeting, including the content of individual presentations can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/cancer-and-enviro> 

# Air Adventures

June 17-21, 2019  
Ages 9-11

A SUMMER CAMP WITH GASP

Slime! Chocolate chip cookies! Pig lungs! What do these have in common? They're all awesome, and they'll all help us to better understand air quality.



Our STEAM-based camp will allow kids to use their creative and logical sides as they learn about the history, health effects, and future of air pollution in our region.

[gasp-pgh.org/2019-air-quality-camp/](http://gasp-pgh.org/2019-air-quality-camp/)

Location: Environmental Charter School, 829 Milton St., Pittsburgh, PA 15218

## GASP's Air Quality Kits Funded by Allegheny County Clean Air Fund

by Chelsea Hilty, GASP Education and Events Coordinator

Last August, the Allegheny County Health Department released two requests for proposals to be funded using the county's Clean Air Fund. The proposed projects were to focus on air quality education or air pollution prevention and were ranked using a point system based on metrics such as estimated number of people to be reached, targeted population, and level of community involvement. GASP applied for the education grant and was one of seven projects chosen to receive funding.

Through this grant GASP is developing three educational air quality kits to be used in classrooms, afterschool programs, and other non-formal educational settings. Each

kit has a different focus area: Air Quality and Health; Air Quality and Citizen Science; and Air Quality, Energy, and Technology. The kits will each come as a self-contained unit with instructions and materials for games, experiments, and projects based on middle school level education standards. Although the activities in a kit build off of each other, the kit design allows for educators to have the freedom to pick and choose which activities they want to use.

Once created, the kits will be available for educators and community partners to borrow at no cost. If you are interested in borrowing or learning more about the kits, email Chelsea at [chelsea@gasp-pgh.org](mailto:chelsea@gasp-pgh.org) or call 412-924-0604 x207.



# Spotlight on a GASP Staff Member

Chelsea Hilty is GASP’s Education and Events Coordinator. This spring will be her second anniversary working for GASP. After receiving a BA in Environmental Studies from Pitt, she worked for several nonprofits doing outreach work. In fact, while doing a fellowship at Tree Pittsburgh, she worked on some educational programs with Jessica, whose position at GASP she took over. She also served as an Air Quality Fellow through the Student Conservation Association’s Green Cities Sustainability Corps, educating people on air quality issues. As Chelsea says, “This position just seemed like a perfect next step for me.”

Chelsea’s job entails doing the bulk of GASP’s education and outreach, as well as planning GASP events. She never finds the work boring as it covers a broad range of assignments. She might lead a girl scout troop on a hike one day and then table at a music night in a community garden the next, so she gets to meet a diverse crowd of people.

Recently, GASP became a community partner for GirlGov’s Health and Environment Committee. GirlGov is a program through the Women and Girls Foundation that gives high school girls the opportunity to learn about, and become active participants in local government. Chelsea explains: “The girls decide everything, including what issues they want to tackle and how to pursue their goals. This year the committee is working to revive a state bill that will help reduce single use plastics. My role is to listen to their ideas and sometimes play devil’s advocate, to try to help steer them in the right direction.”

Chelsea is the youngest of her 4 siblings and has 15 nieces and nephews. She got married this past fall and reports that her husband is “the best person ever.”

Outside of GASP, Chelsea loves doing crafts “to a fault.” Every time she learns of a new craft, she feels compelled to try it. She just knitted several birthday gifts for her nieces and is in the middle of creating a giant painting of a spider in outer space. She has plans to start whittling a bunch of little wooden mushrooms for her yard.

You will not find Chelsea in the ocean. Any ocean. As she states, “I have an irrational fear of sea creatures. I’m glad they exist, I know they all serve a purpose in their ecosystem, I never want to see them. I’ve never been to the ocean. I never intend to go.”

We wish Chelsea the best of luck in her marriage, happy crafting, and no sea creature encounters!



## Join GASP Today!

- \$50 Grassroots Supporters (\$15 low income/student rate)
- \$75 Grassroots Contributors
- \$100 Grassroots Patrons
- \$250 Clean Air Defenders
- \$500 Clean Air Protectors
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other

*Call GASP at (412) 924-0604 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

check  credit card

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

CCV code: \_\_\_\_\_ 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.

# SAVE THE DATE GASP Turns 50!

This year marks 50 years since the Group Against Smog and Pollution started fighting for cleaner, healthier air in southwestern Pennsylvania. It's time to celebrate—and you're invited!

GASP will be celebrating this special anniversary at the historic Rodef Shalom Congregation in Oakland from 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on **Saturday, October 12, 2019**. Guests will enjoy live music, food and drinks, and a silent auction.

The evening will culminate with the **Michelle Madoff Award of Environmental Excellence Ceremony**, where five deserving women will be honored for their work.

Join us, won't you?



ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED



Group Against Smog and Pollution, Inc.  
1133 S. Braddock Ave., Suite 1A  
Pittsburgh, PA 15218

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PITTSBURGH, PA  
PERMIT NO. 712