



State of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

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For Distribution to School Systems via Ohio Department of Education

From: Chris Korleski, Director, Ohio EPA

To: Ohio School Systems

Date: December 8, 2008

Re: This week's USA Today Article on Schools and Toxic Emissions

You may have read or seen a recent media story about air quality in schools or about air quality at a specific Ohio school. As a result, your school system, and the students and parents within your system, may be concerned about potential health impacts from local sources of pollution.

We understand why anyone reading the article in USA Today (or viewing any follow-up local stories) would be concerned about this issue. Indeed, it's our job to evaluate and make sure that air quality across Ohio is protective of public health. However, I must emphasize that before we could or would come to any conclusions about possible localized health risks as a result of toxic chemical exposure, we would need to conduct an in-depth study in the area in question, including conducting long-term monitoring of the air (as opposed to relying upon one-time "grab samples" or modeling data.)

In preparation for its article, USA Today contacted Ohio EPA staff about an air study we conducted in southwestern Ohio several years ago. This study was triggered after a local industry had several unpermitted air releases. It involved months of air sampling at a specific school located across the street from the company where the releases occurred. Such detailed studies are generally necessary to determine the precise state of localized air quality and whether or not air quality might be impacting human health.

To reach the conclusions in its story, USA Today used a computer model utilized by U.S. EPA that simulates air emissions and their effects on air quality. In addition, the newspaper conducted 100 one-time air samples nationwide. This reflects a quick snapshot of air data and estimates of potential impacts on localized quality. We will be reviewing the data that USA Today utilized, and will use this information as a starting point to evaluate what additional inquiries and investigations may be necessary.

When Ohio EPA conducts our detailed air toxics studies, we:

- use rigorous air monitoring, drawing many air tests over time;
- use meteorological data to determine where to place representative air monitors; and
- set monitors at precise locations and at specific heights, following well-established U.S EPA protocol.

Ted Strickland, Governor
Lee Fisher, Lieutenant Governor
Chris Korleski, Director

This type of rigor is not reflected in the USA Today sampling and data analysis. Consequently, while we certainly agree that USA Today has raised a legitimate issue worthy of further scrutiny, please do not assume your students are at immediate risk based on the snapshot of data presented by the USA Today story.

We seek to protect you and your family in other ways as well:

- Ohio EPA air pollution control permits issued to facilities are designed to protect our most vulnerable populations (including children and the elderly);
- Ohio EPA responds to inquiries and complaints about air pollution from factories, businesses and open burning as well as diesel school buses and other mobile sources; and
- we work with the legislature to ensure Ohio's air pollution laws protect the health of our citizens.

If you have specific questions about air quality in your community, please contact Ohio EPA's Public Interest Center at (614) 644-2160 and your call will be directed to the staff member most familiar with your area of the state.

Questions about specific illnesses should be directed to your personal physicians, local health departments or the Ohio Department of Health.