

Summary of Air Quality Issues in Port Townsend - Jefferson County, Washington Fact Sheet – 2008

DOH PUB NO. 334-176

The Washington State Department of Health has completed a health consultation: *Summary of Air Quality Issues and Identification of Information Needed to Address Community Health Concerns – Port Townsend Paper Corporation.*

It's unclear if air emissions from the paper mill in Port Townsend are causing health effects. There's just not enough data to be sure. This fact sheet summarizes the results of our data review and provides information on general air quality issues in the Port Townsend area.

Air pollution and health effects

Air pollution is the presence of contaminants in the air we breathe. Pollution can come from human sources such as cars or industry. It may also come from natural sources like smoke or gases from wildfires or volcanic eruptions.

Human health effects from air pollution may include respiratory irritation, asthma, heart and lung disease, decreased immunity, and increased cancer risk. Young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems may be more at risk. The impact of air pollution on health depends on several things: length of exposure, genetics, pre-existing health conditions, the type of pollutant, and the amount of pollutants we breathe.

Jefferson County Health Data

A recent review of available health data was conducted for Jefferson County. Results showed that lung and bronchial cancer rates as well as asthma hospitalization rates in Jefferson County are similar to Washington State rates.



What can affect our air quality?

The amount of air pollution changes constantly due to weather conditions, industrial activities, vehicle emissions, wood smoke, etc. Several other factors can affect air quality:

Location: Air is usually more polluted in urban areas and near major roadways where emissions from industry and vehicles are closer to communities. Poor air quality may also occur in valleys where airborne chemicals, wood smoke, and other particulates settle.

Weather: Summer heat, winter cold, and lack of air movement can cause stagnant weather conditions, which may lead to poor air quality.

Are odors toxic?

Odors in the air can be caused by various things and affect people in different ways. Bad odors do not necessarily mean you're inhaling bad things or that you will get sick. When faced with strong smells, some people may experience physical symptoms that may include headaches, nausea or dizziness. People may also sense that underlying medical conditions such as asthma or other respiratory conditions may become aggravated by the appearance of strong odors.

Next steps

State and local agencies are working together to learn more about the air quality issues in the Port Townsend area. Gathering more complete data about air emissions will help these agencies assess air quality more accurately.

The Department of Ecology has issued an agreed order with the Port Townsend Paper Corporation as a step toward closing data gaps. This order will ensure that additional air emissions data are collected to create a more complete air emissions inventory. Specific requirements for the Port Townsend Paper Corporation under the agreed order are to:

- Submit an annual inventory of the mill's emissions as well as estimated emissions from 2002, 2005, and 2007.
- Install and operate a continuous weather station on the mill-site with online access. This station will measure and record temperature, wind speed, wind direction, relative humidity, and barometric pressure in the area.
- Estimate air emissions from the wastewater treatment lagoons based on a plan reviewed and approved by Ecology.
- Continue to track odor complaints from the community and specifically identify date, time, and nature of complaints.

How can you protect your health?

Here are things you can do to reduce your exposure and improve air quality in your community.

- Use alternative transportation to cut fuel emissions.
- Check the air quality conditions before planning outdoor activities.
- Limit physical exertion and time spent outdoors when air quality is poor.
- If a woodstove is your source of heat, check to see if the stove is certified for cleaner, more efficient burning.

Helpful links

The Department of Health report, Summary of Air Quality Issues and Identification of Information Needed to Address Community Health Concerns is available online:
www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/oehas/consults.htm

Check current weather conditions using the weather station at the Port Townsend Paper Corporation Web site:
www.ptpc.com/community.shtml

Check current air quality conditions using the Olympic Clean Air Agency Port Townsend monitor:
www.orcaa.org/airQuality/currentaq.php

Check to see if your woodstove is certified and get tips for cleaner, more efficient burning:
www.orcaa.org/programs/woodstoves.php

Report air odor problems

When reporting an odor problem, please make sure you provide the following information:

- Date and time
- Duration of the odor incident
- Location where the odor was detected
- Description of the odor
- Your name and phone number (optional)

To report an odor problem, please call:

Port Townsend Paper Corporation
360-379-4224

Department of Ecology
360-407-6773

For more information, contact:

Washington State Department of Health
Toll Free 1-877-485-7316

