

**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Environment Hearing
Monday, September 16, 2019
Kemeny Recreation Center, Detroit, Michigan
Comments Submitted By -- Dolores Leonard, Ed.D., NBCC, LPC**

Purpose

The purpose of this Subcommittee on Environment hearing is to examine air and water pollution in Michigan, with a specific focus on Detroit and Flint, and on the disparate impacts of pollution on low-income communities and communities of color. The Subcommittee is interested in:

- a. Negative health effects of living in heavily polluted areas
- b. Community efforts to hold industry and elected officials accountable for past and current actions.

The comments below will focus on the health and pollution impacts on residents living in zip code 48217 located in Detroit, Michigan. Additionally, comments will describe residents' efforts in being driven to assist the community without elected official assistance.

Background

The 48217-zip code community is a small enclave that is a part of the city of Detroit, but few people realize this community exists because of its location being bordered by the Downriver cities of River Rouge, Ecorse, Lincoln Park, and Melvindale. The average income is below \$30,000; education level, generally high school graduation. Census 2010 population data for 48217 was 8,210. The stated Black or African American population was 6,625 (80.7%); total occupied housing units, 3,216 (80.9%).

In March 2016, Zoe Schlanger wrote a Newsweek article, "Detroit makes you sick.", She states, "There is something like 52 sites of heavy industry in a tiny little three-mile area in River Rouge, Ecorse, Melvindale and the 48217 area." The article is very explicit in describing the living and health conditions caused by pollution.

In a March 29, 2016, article written by Schlanger and appears as a website article "Michigan's Air Pollution Problem Is Much Bigger than The Water In Flint", Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources. The article describes a parent having an asthma attack. Why not move? Low rent is the answer.

Another March 2016, Newsweek article, looks at pollution and uses the term environmental racism. Sean Proctor writes,

“Flint had lead; southwest Detroit has sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and carbon dioxide—plus benzene, toluene, cadmium and mercury. A litany of carcinogens and respiratory irritants fill the air residents have no choice but to breathe. Cancer and asthma. A population sucking on a tailpipe.”

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) now known as Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) has no choice but to issue operating permits if the application documentation meets all necessary emission guidelines. However, what is not being considered and omitted in permitting is the cumulative emission of all industries within the area who are emitting the same chemical or competing chemicals within the three-mile radius of the local cities. For my community, this is a life and death situation.

The reader is encouraged to read the 48217 Community Air Monitoring Project, September 2016-September 2017 and 48217 Community Air Monitoring Project, Sept 2017-Sept 2018. The website for both reports is www.michigan.gov/48217monitoring. At that website, not only are the two yearly reports available but also several health related documents related to the city of Detroit and the 48217 zip code community. Also, the 2017-2018 report Appendix H shows a map of Southwest Detroit emphasizing emission sources.

48217 COMMUNITY AIR MONITORING PROJECT

This is a 48217-zip code community led project. Collaboration was implemented with Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA-Region 5), and University of Michigan faculty and research assistants, the Sierra Club and New Mt. Hermon Missionary Baptist Church.

Elected officials were purposely not invited to participate in the project. There have been so many instances over the years when the community sought relief from elected officials and it was not forthcoming. If it was given, it was not at the expectation level the community was seeking. In other words, there was and remains a sense of lack of trust in elected officials.

For residents in this community, oral history is the traditional method of conveying concerns. There is an expectation that they will be listened to and heard. That does not always happen, but it is getting better. Also, in this community, there is a history of illness—breathing, lack of breathing, cancer, asthma, high blood pressure, etc.

In June 2015, I, along with approximately 20 environmentalists, was invited to meet with the MDEQ director to discuss how the department could assist with our environmental concerns. We were asked to submit comments both orally and in writing. Later, we were asked to submit a proposal how the MDEQ could assist with our environmental goals. My proposal was accepted which focused on monitoring the air within my 48217 zip code community. Funding was available for one year.

As the coordinator of the project, I invited persons who lived within our elementary school districts (whether the school still existed or not—Jeffries, Fisher, Mark Twain and Boynton; the only remaining school was Mark Twain; Hunter school district neighborhood had been bought out by Marathon Oil Refinery.) to represent their neighborhood.

From previous workshops with a faculty member at the University of Michigan, we were able to supply information relating to the polluters in the community. A University research assistant created a table of companies within a three-mile radius of the 48217-zip code community that included the chemicals being emitted by the company and the amount of release. This information was derived from the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI). As individuals and as a body, we looked at the chemicals that were being emitted. Our chemical listing was given to MDEQ to analyze. There were a number on our list that MDEQ was not required to analyze. Some chemicals were analyzed on a 6-day basis or a real-time basis. MDEQ held four open meetings to keep the community abreast of the process and available findings.

While the community did not and still does not agree with the findings relating to health risk, the data are available. Comparing the 48217-zip code community to National Ambient Air Quality Standards, which uses health limits, the data do not equate to what we visually see happening in the community. We can visually count, by block, the residents who have died of cancer; who have asthma. However, we do not know the cause of the onset. We only know what we see. Eight persons in a million persons who might contract a disease does not equate to visual knowledge. The Michigan.gov/48217monitoring website list several health studies conducted in Detroit. A Southwest Detroit Cancer Study from 1999-2009 is located there.

The report summary states:

- Except for sulfuric acid, all pollutants were below the screening levels for non-cancer related protection.

- SO₂, lead, and PM 2.5 were compared to federal health limits: primary National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Monitored levels were below the level of the NAAQS.....
- Except for sulfuric acid, all pollutants were below the screening levels for noncancer-related health protection.
- Two out of 53 sulfuric acid samples were above the screening level. Breathing a high level of sulfuric acid can impair lung function, and people with lung disease like asthma are more susceptible to these health problems.
- For pollutants that can cause cancer, the additional risk of developing cancer over a person's entire lifetime was considered. The pollutants of potential concern in this study were arsenic, naphthalene, and hexavalent chromium.
- Some pollutants, like benzene, are also likely to be of potential concern. However, these pollutants were rarely or never detected due to limitations at the laboratory. Therefore, some pollutant levels are not known.

Even though we do not agree with the national measurement standards, I feel comfortable knowing the MDEQ staff has conducted their work on an extremely professional level. I have the highest respect and regard for them as they work under the constraints of the pollution guidelines under which they must operate.

The question for me was now that we have a report on the various emitting chemicals what do I do with it? The community needs to be made aware of the health impacts of the emitting chemicals and in turn, alert their medical general practitioner. With the assistance of an University of Michigan research assistant, each of the emitting chemicals in the MDEQ baseline 48217 zip code report were researched to determine its potential health impact. A document does exist that identifies each chemical, its potential health impact and the reference where the information was retrieved.

However, the problem becomes, most medical physicians are not trained in environmental diseases and conceivably are misdiagnosing and treating illnesses.

CONCLUSION

Along the way, I have come to understand that it is the political environment (elected officials) and the economic environment (industries, companies and stockholders) that dictate the guidelines written for environmental protection for citizens. I understand, in many cases, it is the elected politicians who, relying upon campaign financing from lobbyist of the very companies emitting in my community, write laws under which I must live while they may not understand fully the ramifications of their writings. I also recognize that, in many cases, it is the lobbyist who write the environmental laws that are given to the Environmental Protection Agency to implement which are given to states to enforce.