

## **Uneasy Breathing -- Air Pollution in Oakland**

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**By Jane Kay, San Francisco Chronicle**

Laws and public health regulations ignore the harmful health effects of air pollution borne by many low-income, minority residents living on the urbanized edges of San Francisco Bay, particularly from a nasty combination of industrial and diesel truck emissions, says a new report researched in part by the hardest hit Oakland communities.

Residents of the Hegenberger Corridor in the Elmhurst neighborhood, working with the non-profit Communities for A Better Environment, compiled a list of 216 polluting sources from foundries and auto body shops to idling trucks that blast particles of soot, dust and toxics into the air.



Paul Chinn/The Chronicle

### **Idling trucks line up to pick up cargo at the Port of Oakland.**

The array of polluting sources, including gas stations, supermarket parking lots and recycling centers, boost the unhealthy levels of contaminants already coming from freeways, including Interstate 880, associated with traffic to the Oakland Coliseum, Oakland International Airport and Port of Oakland.

The survey found that many small but potentially harmful air-pollution sources have been left out of the official inventories kept by the California Air Resources Board, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and Oakland. The government inventories generally don't include stationary sources that release fewer than 10 tons per year of emissions and the disparate smaller sources such as trucks resting while idling on residential streets, the report said.

"This failing makes the state's inventories inadequate" to serve communities, the report said. The real pollution, or cumulative effect of it, isn't recognized when it comes to recognizing and trying to fix the problem, it said.

Mixed in with industrial polluters, the community researchers found 49 locations where groups of people can be especially sensitive to air pollution, including at day care centers, churches, schools, parks and retirement homes.

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The report examines the historical factors that played a part in the area's deterioration: "After World War II, the flight of the white middle-class and discriminatory practices by financial institutions contributed to the disinvestment and disenfranchisement of East Oakland," it said.

"The community is threatened by the added burden of poor schools, inadequate health care and social services and employment opportunities largely limited to low-paying stressful jobs," the report said.

Yet, the community has rich history of grassroots activism, the researchers found, buoyed by churches, traditional religious and apostolic groups. Such names as ACORN, Just Cause Oakland, Sobrante Park Neighborhood Collaborative, Elmhurst and Brookfield Neighborhood associations have spoke out against toxic-chemical contamination and worked for adequate housing and safe streets.

About 11,000 people live in the Hegenberger Corridor, which consists of 49.1 percent latinos, 42.6 percent African Americans, 3.5 percent Asian and Pacific Islanders, 2.7 percent Whites and 1.5 percent of residents reporting two or more races, 0.3 percent American Indians and 0.2 percent some other race. In the wider part of Oakland known as East Oakland, the household median income is \$23,000-\$39,999, approximately \$20,000 less per year than the U.S. average for median family income.

The report is an attempt to bring environmental justice to a beleaguered part of the San Francisco Bay Area where race and poverty play into an unhealthy environment. Miles away in West Oakland, residents suffer the same kinds of environmental stresses. They breathe filthy air from idling trucks, a company called Custom Alloy Scrap Sales that melts a conglomeration of metals as well as other industrial hazards.

The same pollutants are linked to respiratory and heart disease, and some of the toxic air contaminants are carcinogens.

The next step for the Hegenberger Corridor is to monitor particulate matter and volatile organic compounds.

The neighborhood experts who've been living with the air pollution for decades know the solutions.

They want the government agencies to require replacing or retrofitting older, dirtier diesel engines in trucks, enforcing California's 5-minute idling rule and establishing

truck routes that eliminate trucks from driving through and parking in residential neighborhoods. It's an outrage for the practice to continue, and shows little respect for their health, they say.

When governmental bodies make development decisions, they should keep in mind that the industrialized neighborhoods of Oakland already have their share of polluters, they say. In addition, they'd like to see the heavy concentration of auto body repair shops diminished by relocating them elsewhere.

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