

Oakland residents test neighborhood air quality

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 By Alan Wang

EAST OAKLAND, CA (KGO) -- Community activists in the East Bay are taking on the challenge of poor air quality. Some people in one Oakland neighborhood decided to count for themselves the sources for hazardous emissions. What they found was almost four times more than the state counted.

In East Oakland, students at Encompass Academy have a high rate of asthma.

"It feels like my throat is dry and sometimes I got to use my inhaler," says Kayla Phason, an Encompass Academy Student.

There's an obvious odor around the school. Two of Kenisha Lane's three children have asthma.

"Metal, it could be burning metal or something like that. I'm not exactly sure," says Kenisha Lane, an East Oakland resident.

"Before I moved here to East Oakland, I did not have asthma. This month I was diagnosed with asthma," says Nehanda Imara, with Communities for a Better Environment.

At a neighborhood meeting, a health and justice non-profit called Communities for a Better Environment compared two maps. The California Air Resources Board map shows 28 sources of hazardous emissions, but residents who walked and mapped their own neighborhood, with GPS, found more than a hundred sources in the same square mile.

The California Air Resources Board admits that many of these extra sources of pollution would not have been detected by them, had it not been for this study.

The state air quality agency says it missed the many trucks that idle their engines along San Leandro Street. Also 71 auto body shops, three pest control businesses and 12 gas stations.

"That's a really dramatic difference. It shows that we generally assume that these smaller businesses are spread out fairly uniformly throughout the community. In this case, they appeared to be bunched up in a smaller area," says Alvaro Alvarado, with the California Air Resources Board.

These neighbors are part of a new movement called "Ground Truthing."

"This is part of a larger movement in California. Ground truthing efforts are going on the CBE is partially leading in Southern California. There have been efforts in Barrio Logan and San

Diego," says Professor Rachel Morello-Frosch, Ph.D., from UC Berkeley's Environmental Health Department.

The state air quality agencies say detailed information is hard to come by. Next, community members will be trained to monitor the air in their neighborhoods.

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Video:

<http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/health&id=6407853#bodyText>