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Toxic air pollution report finds continued gains



NASSCO shipyard as seen from the bay. (Misael Virgen / San Diego Union-Tribune)



By **Joshua Emerson Smith**

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The county adopted its latest “hot spot” report for toxic air pollution Wednesday, which found progress continues on limiting harmful emissions from industrial and government facilities.

Cancerous and other dangerous air pollutants have been reduced by nearly 25 percent since 2009 and roughly 88 percent since 1989 when the program started, according to the most recent [Air Toxics Hot Spots Program Report](#).

To achieve these results, business that emit cancerous pollution above a specific threshold are required to send

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“The air toxics levels have gone down, and that’s because once they were identified, facilities had to do public notifications, which means frankly, there’s public pressure on them,” said Robert Kard, director of the Air Pollution Control District San Diego County, which prepared the report.

“We’re not resting on our laurels here,” he added. “We’ve seen a dramatic reduction, but we want to reduce further.”

The measurements are taken at monitors in [El Cajon](#) and Chula Vista and don’t include diesel emissions, which can’t be directly monitored in the same way. The most recent report looks at data from 2015.

Environmentalists point out that 42 percent of air pollution in the county comes from mobile sources such as cars and trucks, so the district’s hot spot report doesn’t give a full picture of the impact on public health.

“Many of the industries also generate considerable diesel mobile source emissions, so that the separation between industry and mobile sources is not real,” said Joy Williams, research director with the Environmental Health Coalition. “Locations with dense concentrations of industry and mobile sources together will have higher health hazards of toxics from all these sources.”

The district oversees 3,000 facilities, including 1,750 diesel engine facilities, 368 auto body shops, 683 gasoline stations, and 117 dry cleaners, according to the report.

While only about 2 percent of air pollution in the county comes from these stationary sources — as opposed to emissions from sources such as vehicles, waste burning or pesticides — facilities that emit toxic pollution into the air can affect those living nearby and working onsite.

Over the years, the county has seen a reduction of those businesses that emit notable amounts of toxic air pollution.

A number of businesses have routinely been singled out as the region’s highest emitters. However, these businesses are not violating specific laws or standards and are allowed to continue operating without change as long as they issue public notifications every two years, according to district officials.

State standards are strict and residents shouldn’t overreact if they get a public notice in the mail, Kard said. Specifically, he said that Barrio Logan, which has a number of industries on the list, doesn’t specifically suffer from this type of toxic pollution because wind currents dilute much of the emissions.

“I don’t think they need to be worried,” Kard said. “It’s a heads up just so they’re informed of what the potential risk is, but there are really conservative calculations.”

Four facilities in the county currently issue letters to nearby residents and workers because of emission known

Facilities include:

- Pacific Ship Repair and Fabrication, 1625 Rigel St., San Diego, emits hexavalent chromium from welding. The cancer risk for those most exposed is calculated at 41 in a million.
- City of San Diego Pump Station 2 at 4077 North Harbor Dr., which moves wastewater for about 2.2 million people in the city and 15 other municipalities, emits a number of chemicals into the air from daily operations, including formaldehyde, polycyclic and tetrachloride. The cancer risk for those most exposed is calculated at 33 in a million.
- National Steel and Shipbuilding Company or NASSCO at 28th Street and Harbor Drive, San Diego, emits hexavalent chromium from welding. The cancer risk for those most exposed is calculated at 21.2 cases in a million.
- Naval Air Station North Island on the north end of Coronado emits benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and hexavalent chromium. The air pollution comes from fueling and jet engines, as well as welding and painting. The cancer risk for those most exposed is calculated at 13.5 cases in a million.

The Miramar Landfill at 5180 Convoy St. and GKN Chem-tronics, which manufactures aerospace parts at 1150 West Bradley Ave. in El Cajon, are also required to send out public notifications based on non-cancerous concerns of arsenic and nickel emissions respectively.

In the future, more businesses could be forced to send out public notifications as a result of tightening air pollution state standards, district officials said. The state Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, which oversees the “hot spot” reporting program, has recently revised its calculations for impacts to infants and young children.

“It changes the results of the health risk assessment, and depending on the facility and the exposure it could show a higher risk,” said Jim Swaney, chief of the engineering division with the district. “It could show a lower risk than before. Until you do the analysis you really don’t know.”

Roughly, 40 percent of people in the United States will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their life, according to the National Cancer Institute.

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