

***Writes that sustained monitoring is "vitally important to the well being of the greater Tonawanda community"***

Tonawanda, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) today wrote to the Commissioner of New York's State Department of Environmental Conservation asking them to maintain a strong presence in Tonawanda as they monitor the air quality in the neighborhoods surrounding Tonawanda Coke.

Slaughter cited the positive effects that the monitoring has had on the local air quality, notably a drop in benzene levels by 86 percent, but cautioned against ending the monitoring prematurely.

"I recently became aware that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) is reviewing the operation of the remaining two air monitors in the industrial area of Tonawanda as a result of budget constraints. I call on the NYS DEC to maintain the air monitoring operation in the Tonawanda industrial area as it is vitally important to the well being of the greater Tonawanda community and to the continued environmental progress of the region," Slaughter wrote today. "The NYS DEC cannot claim victory yet. This operation must be maintained in order for the continued regulation of the major polluters."

The full text of Slaughter's Letter is included below.

"The residents of Tonawanda need an explicit commitment from Commissioner Martens to continuing the air monitoring in their community," said Erin Heaney, Executive Director of the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York. "Air monitoring has been a critical tool in addressing the unacceptably high exposures of air pollution Western New Yorkers are exposed to on a daily basis. We are grateful for Congresswoman Slaughter's support for this vital community need."

Tonawanda is forced to deal with millions of pounds of toxins that are released from 53 facilities and two major highways. A 2009 recent report found dangerous levels of benzene in the sky above Tonawanda. Benzene is a dangerous carcinogen dangerous to human health. As a result of out of control air pollution, some neighborhoods in Tonawanda have a risk of developing

cancer 100 times greater than that of the New York State guideline.

Slaughter has been a long-time partner of the Clean Air Coalition. In March 2011, Slaughter [ap  
plauded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) for awarding a \$10,000 grant to Clean Air Coalition of Western New York to address the risks from multiple sources of toxic pollution in their environment.

A month earlier, Slaughter submitted a statement to the Congressional Record making the case for the Clean Air Act citing the important work yet to come to improve air quality in Tonawanda and across the country. She said in part,

"During my time serving the 28th District of New York, I have received multiple letters from the people of Tonawanda telling me about how their family and loved ones have developed cancer, asthma and other illnesses due to the extremely poor air quality in their community. Today, I would like to share the story of Ann, a woman who has lived in Tonawanda for 16 years. Ann's mother and father moved to the city to fulfill the American dream of owning their own home. Ann's mother cultivated her own garden in her yard, spending her free time outside gardening and breathing in what she thought was fresh, New York air. Sadly, Ann lost her mother to cancer at the young age of 67, just nine years after moving to Tonawanda and breathing the dirty air. Ann can't help to think that if only her family knew what toxic, cancerous chemicals the local facilities were pumping into the air, they could have protected the health of their loved ones. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of upholding the Clean Air Act and supporting the Environmental Protection Act in doing its work to protect the American people against dangerous corporate polluters."

And in 2009, Slaughter wrote to then-DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis [asking that the DEC  
develop a benzene reduction plan](#) as soon as possible to significantly reduce benzene emissions from the Tonawanda Coke plant.

### **Text of Slaughter's Letter to DEC Commissioner Joseph Martens**

February 24, 2012

Commissioner Joseph Martens

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

625 Broadway

Albany, New York 12233-1011

Dear Commissioner Martens,

I write today to address an urgent concern of public health and well being. I recently became aware that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) is reviewing the operation of the remaining two air monitors in the industrial area of Tonawanda as a result of budget constraints. I call on the NYS DEC to maintain the air monitoring operation in the Tonawanda industrial area, as it is vitally important to the well being of the greater Tonawanda community and to the continued environmental progress of the region.

For years I have communicated with the NYS DEC about the air monitoring operation in Tonawanda. I highly commend the NYS DEC for this operation, which began in 2007. Because of the data from the NYS DEC's air monitoring, community groups like the Clean Air Coalition of Western New York, were able to utilize the NYS DEC's data and in turn have been able to identify polluters in the industrial area of Tonawanda. As a result of the data from the air monitors, the Clean Air Coalition has been able to successfully implement initiatives to advocate for the environment and health of our neighbors, such as the federal E3 Program and Tonawanda Sustainability Initiative.

The NYS DEC cannot claim victory yet. This operation must be maintained in order for the continued regulation of the major polluters. As you know, in the past the operation found elevated levels of 6 hazardous air pollutants, including benzene. Since the inception of the NYS DEC's air monitoring efforts, benzene levels have dropped by 86 percent.

## Slaughter Tells DEC to Continue Monitoring Air Quality at Tonawanda Coke

February 24, 2012

---

There is still more work to do and air monitoring is the keystone to those improvements. I respectfully encourage you to maintain the operation of the two air monitoring stations in the industrial area of Tonawanda.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress