

"Thanks to the DEC's continued air monitoring, Tonawanda residents will be able to breathe easier."

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) today applauded the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for agreeing to continue monitoring air quality in the neighborhoods surrounding Tonawanda Coke. Today the DEC announced that two air monitors in Tonawanda will remain in operation through 2012 and 2013.

"The air monitoring being done by the DEC has been invaluable to the residents living near Tonawanda Coke. I believe that it is because of the monitoring they're doing, and the incredible community involvement by the Clean Air Coalition, that has forced a change in Tonawanda Coke for the better," said Slaughter. "But we know that it would be all too easy to change course so I applaud the DEC for the work they have done and the monitoring they've pledged to do today. Thanks to their DEC's continued air monitoring, Tonawanda residents will be able to breathe easier."

Last week Slaughter urged the DEC to maintain the air monitoring operation in the Tonawanda industrial area and penned a letter to Commissioner Joseph Martens saying their presence is, "vitally important to the well being of the greater Tonawanda community and to the continued environmental progress of the region."

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.

Slaughter's letter to the DEC is included below.

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 applauded 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.

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