



Office of the Director

Kate Brown, Governor

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February 15, 2016

Governor Kate Brown  
254 State Capitol  
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown:

Thank you for the opportunity to describe the steps the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) is taking to address cadmium, arsenic and chromium in Southeast and Northeast Portland. In response to this issue, OHA is taking action to:

- Inform the public about steps they should take to get health information.
- Support people and families who have been exposed to cadmium, arsenic and chromium and collaborate with care providers to ensure residents receive appropriate and effective testing and treatment.
- Monitor ongoing exposure and health effects, so the public can be alerted to any potential health issues that may emerge.

Specifically, in response to your questions:

**What was the timeline of activity, starting with when data indicating high levels of cadmium and arsenic were first detected in the air and in other media; when the agencies were notified; the timing of actions triggered by that information; when the agencies and the county were engaged to inform the public; and when and how the public was informed initially?**

- **OHA notification:** On January 21, 2016, OHA toxicologist Dr. David Farrer was informed in a telephone call from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that air monitoring data collected near Southeast 22nd Avenue and Southeast Powell Boulevard in Portland detected cadmium and arsenic above benchmark levels set to determine potential adverse effects on health. DEQ staff agreed to arrange a conference call as soon as possible with researchers from the US Forest Service, who had collected the data. A conference call was set for the following day.

- **Conference call with partner agencies:** On January 22, 2016, at 4:00 p.m., OHA participated in a conference call with DEQ, the US Forest Service, and the Multnomah County Health Department to review the data, learn about the collection methodology and discuss next steps. OHA staff agreed to evaluate and translate comparison values for toxicity thresholds for the monitored results based on data from other cities, states and the federal government.
- **Review science to assess health hazards:** Between January 25 and January 29, 2016, OHA Environmental Public Health staff analyzed the DEQ data and reviewed health research to assess potential risks for the levels of cadmium and arsenic exposure recorded in the data.

These steps were consistent with OHA's standard process to evaluate emerging health threats. In this case, OHA reviewed the literature of health effects for cadmium and arsenic exposure and evaluated the findings to apply them to the levels measured over the 30 days they were recorded in Southeast Portland.

- DEQ's monitoring measured chromium, but the standard method used could not distinguish which form. The most common form of chromium is the less toxic chromium 3. Readings were well below chromium 3 benchmarks, but above benchmarks for chromium 6, the rarer, but more toxic form. Without definitive information about the form of chromium that was present, OHA staff were not able to assess potential hazards with any certainty at that time.
- **Identifying area of potential exposure:** By the end of the day on January 26, 2016, OHA staff had reviewed enough comparable data sources to be confident the levels of cadmium and arsenic recorded in Southeast Portland approached one published threshold of potential acute health risks; staff continued to review the literature to assess the extent and types of risks the metals posed with more certainty. At the same time, staff needed more information about the size of the affected geographic area to provide usable information to the public.

OHA staff asked partner agencies for maps of the potential exposure areas. The US Forest Service agreed to produce the maps as quickly as possible. Staff from OHA, DEQ and the Forest Service stayed in daily contact to monitor progress of map production.

- **Briefing the state health officer and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** On January 27, 2016, OHA Environmental Public Health staff briefed State Health Officer Dr. Katrina Hedberg. Dr. Hedberg reviewed the data and discussed its interpretation and limitations with DEQ.

The same day, OHA staff briefed the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (funding agency) and forwarded the data. The CDC provided informal consultation and advice on OHA's assessment of potential health effects.

- **Notification of OHA Director and Public Health Director:** Environmental Public Health (EPH) staff verbally notified Public Health Director Lillian Shirley and Deputy Director Priscilla Lewis on January 29. The public health director and deputy director each met separately with EPH and OHA communications staff on February 1, and on February 2, a finalized issue paper was sent to OHA Director Lynne Saxton and policy advisor Jeremy Vandehey.
- **Planning public notification:** On January 29, 2016, the agencies held a meeting to plan community notification. DEQ and OHA staff tentatively planned an announcement on Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2016. However, OHA staff proposed moving the notification date to Feb. 3, 2016, because maps were not expected to be available until that date (ultimately, maps were not finalized and released until Friday, Feb. 5, 2016). Staff from both agencies began preparing a joint news release, a frequently asked questions document and other informational materials for public release.
  - **Findings announced:** On February 3, DEQ and OHA issued a joint news release announcing the investigation of metals pollutants in SE Portland air. On February 4, KinderCare Education, LLC, which operates CCLS Fred Meyer, the daycare center near Bullseye Glass, hosted a meeting for CCLC parents and teachers at the DoubleTree by Hilton Portland and invited representatives of the DEQ, OHA and Multnomah County Health Department to discuss the investigation and answer their questions. OHA also finalized and posted content for a website devoted to the investigation.
  - **Public meeting:** Multnomah County Public Health, with support from DEQ and OHA, scheduled a public meeting at Cleveland High School on February 9 to hear concerns from members of the SE Portland community, and make agency and academic expert resources available to discuss the investigation and answer questions from concerned citizens. An estimated 700 people attended.
  - **Guidance to physicians:** OHA's toxicologist Dr. Farrer collaborated with Oregon Poison Center and Northwest Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit to develop guidance to health care providers about medical

testing for cadmium and arsenic. That guidance was completed and posted on OHA's website, [www.healthoregon.org/metalsemissions](http://www.healthoregon.org/metalsemissions) on February 5, 2016, and updated February 6 and February 11, 2016.

**What are the next steps the agencies and the county will take to address these contaminants, when will they be taken, and how will the public be notified they are safe from these emissions?**

OHA is taking action to inform the public and health care providers, so people who live and work in the affected areas can evaluate their levels of exposure, minimize their risks and gain greater peace of mind:

- **Assessing incidence of cancer:** The Oregon State Cancer Registry (OSCaR) in the Public Health Division is analyzing data on specific types of invasive cancers associated with cadmium and arsenic exposure (e.g., lung and bladder cancer) within the hotspots in Southeast and North Portland identified by DEQ's maps. We expect to conclude this analysis and release the data by the end of next week.
- **Helping people and their physicians assess personal risk:** The most accurate way for people to assess their own levels of exposure or their family members' exposure is through a urine test.
  - **Access to testing:** OHA is setting up the capability to receive urine sample data from people who have voluntarily been tested. The results of those data would guide whether more proactive, systematic testing is needed. If so, additional staffing and resources would be required.
  - **Partnering with labs to assess population results and evaluate long-term health effects:** OHA is working with laboratories to collect test results, while ensuring the identity of tested individuals is protected, and track elevated levels of cadmium and arsenic across the population.
    - These laboratory data can be used by health care providers to better understand and treat potential long-term health issues for their patients (such as regular screening for diseases associated with these metals), as well as by public health for tracking exposures.
    - OHA will develop this database by February 29, 2016.

- **Support DEQ's ongoing investigative actions and emissions monitoring:** Because Bullseye Glass and Uroboros have voluntarily stopped using the metals in their glass-making processes, we expect air quality readings to return to normal in the surrounding neighborhood.

OHA will continue to work with DEQ to evaluate health hazards. The agencies have been in continuous communication since January 21.

- OHA is working with DEQ and the US Forest Service to analyze additional air monitoring data to assess the persistence of hazards from these or other metals, or the emergence of any new potential sources of health risk.
- OHA will provide accurate, specific and timely information about potential health impacts to the public, public health partners, policymakers and other stakeholders.

**What are the actions and timeline for the Oregon Health Authority, working with Multnomah County Health, to inform the public about possible health risks from these emissions and actions people should take to address health concerns?**

- **Notification and updates on environmental health issues:** OHA will work with Multnomah County Health Department and DEQ to keep the public up-to-date on this exposure and other environmental health issues.
  - **Hotline:** OHA established a hotline to answer questions from people and health care providers. A temporary number, 971-673-0185, and email address, [EHAP.Info@state.or.us](mailto:EHAP.Info@state.or.us), have been established to respond to concerns from the community.
  - **Community meetings:** OHA will participate regular meetings in the affected areas of Southeast and North Portland, including a meeting Multnomah County Health Department and Portland Public Schools will host at Tubman Middle School on Thursday, Feb. 18, 2016, 5- 9 p.m.
  - **Electronic updates and social media:** OHA will establish a listserv and dedicated social media accounts to ensure that people can sign up for regular updates or news about important environmental health developments. We will post weekly updates on the OHA website.
  - **Incident command:** OHA, Multnomah County, and DEQ have initiated an incident command structure (ICS), including a joint information center

(JIC), to more efficiently and effectively coordinate activities including sampling, public health assessment, communications, community outreach and response, and community exposure monitoring.

**What are the concepts for longer-term steps, in terms of policy change and resources, needed to more effectively address the issue of hazardous air emissions in the Portland area?**

The emission of toxic metals in urban areas remains allowable under current federal and state rules. Hazardous pollutants typically found in low concentrations, such as cadmium and arsenic, are not regulated under the federal Clean Air Act. OHA will re-examine our governing regulatory frameworks and permitting processes to better inform emission standards based on health-related information.

Apart from statutory and regulatory changes, OHA is committed to working in close partnership with DEQ to advance public health data and considerations into the regulatory and permitting process.

At OHA, we are committed to continuing our work with our state, local and federal partners to provide accurate health information in the near term, to use science and data to continuously assess and establish appropriate health standards and recommend policy improvements as needed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynne Saxton". The signature is enclosed in a dashed rectangular border.

Lynne Saxton  
Director