

Air quality in Northwest Portland

Questions and answers about air quality near Chapman School

[Air toxics](#) are a serious concern in Portland. Air toxics are generally defined as air pollutants known or suspected to cause cancer or other serious health problems. Air toxics include diesel soot and other particulate matter, benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (tar-like by-products from auto exhaust and wood smoke) and metals including manganese, nickel and arsenic.



DEQ studies show that these pollutants are present in the air near Chapman School. These and other air toxics are also present in all major urban areas across the county, including Portland and throughout Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington Counties. In Portland, these pollutants exist at levels that may increase the risk of cancer and cause other adverse health effects over a lifetime of exposure. However, these pollutants are not expected to cause immediate harm.

Is the air at Chapman School and the surrounding community safe to breathe?

Because the [Northwest Neighborhood](#) and Chapman School are located in an urban setting adjacent to both industry and freeways, there are higher levels of some air toxics than in other areas of the region. In the short-term, the scientific information DEQ uses says the air is safe to breathe. However, DEQ is concerned about the potential long-term (lifetime) impact of air toxics in this neighborhood and others in the Portland region.

Where do the odors come from and what is being done?

DEQ is often asked about odors. The presence of an odor does not necessarily mean there are toxic amounts of chemicals in the air. However, odors can affect our health and quality of life even if the chemicals are below toxic levels.

Industry and roadways are both sources of odors. Construction and transportation projects can also produce odors. Nearby industrial sources of odors include coffee roasters, print shops, breweries and the [ESCO](#) steel foundry. ESCO's casting processes produce especially distinctive odors that can smell like burning car brakes.

Neighborhood representatives have signed a [Good Neighbor Agreement](#) with ESCO concerning ways ESCO will reduce odors, particulates and air toxics. DEQ plans to have ESCO's air quality permit renewal available for public comment in December 2011.

Regardless of steps ultimately taken, there will still likely be some odors from ESCO and other sources in the industrial area. In spite of the odor problem, ESCO has a good history of complying with air quality regulations and the conditions of its DEQ air permit.

What is DEQ doing to reduce the risk factors that face our children?

Air toxics in the Portland area have decreased over the last 20 years as the result of successful programs to reduce smog. These programs include regulations for industry, vehicles and woodstoves. As part of its long-standing commitment to reducing air toxics, DEQ convened the [Portland Air Toxics Solutions](#) Advisory Committee between August 2009 and October 2011.

The purpose of the committee was to evaluate information about air toxics problems and provide input on strategies for a proposed plan to further reduce air toxics. The proposed plan prioritizes sources for emission reductions and recommends follow-up to reduce the air toxics causing the most health risk in the Portland region. DEQ will make the draft plan available and seek public comments in winter 2011-2012.

Are citizens getting full disclosure about air pollution?

Yes. Portland is leading the nation in studying and working to reduce air toxics, but there is still a lot we don't know. We know the health effects of some pollutants while scientists are investigating the health effects of others. DEQ makes all the information we have available on our website and upon request.

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DEQ is a leader in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of Oregon's air, land and water.

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