

Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., *Chairman*  
Carlos Rubinstein, *Commissioner*  
Toby Baker, *Commissioner*  
Zak Covar, *Executive Director*



## TEXAS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

*Protecting Texas by Reducing and Preventing Pollution*

June 01, 2013

Robin Ikeda, MD, MPH  
Acting Director, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry  
4770 Buford Hwy NE  
Atlanta, GA 30341

Re: ATSDR draft Health Consultation "Assessing the Public Health Implications of the Criteria (NAAQS) Air Pollutants and Hydrogen Sulfide, Midlothian Area Air Quality, Midlothian, Ellis County, Texas."

Dear Dr. Ikeda,

On November 16, 2012, ATSDR published a draft version of a health consultation entitled "Assessing the Public Health Implications of the Criteria (NAAQS) Air Pollutants and Hydrogen Sulfide, Midlothian Area Air Quality, Midlothian, Ellis County, Texas" (hereafter referred to as HC) for public comment. Our agency, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), submitted substantial comments on the HC on February 18, 2013 because we have very serious concerns about the assessment and its recommendations. On May 10, 2013, our staff participated in a teleconference, as requested by your staff, to discuss our comments. Following this meeting, we are not convinced that your staff understood our position or that they will rectify the significant issues identified. In light of this, I want to bring a few of our overarching comments to your attention prior to the finalization of the HC.

One of the recommendations made in the HC is that "TCEQ should take actions to reduce future SO<sub>2</sub> emissions from TXI to prevent harmful exposures." This recommendation is perplexing because the ambient air monitor, which is sited downwind of TXI in accordance with USEPA requirements, is monitoring levels five times lower than the new SO<sub>2</sub> standard of 75 ppb. What is the legal basis for requiring further reductions from a company that is well within compliance of a standard? ATSDR made similar recommendations for PM<sub>2.5</sub>, for which monitoring in the Midlothian area also demonstrates compliance with the PM<sub>2.5</sub> NAAQS. Rather than making legally-questionable recommendations, we request that ATSDR make reasonable, health-protective, and achievable recommendations, such as "TCEQ should ensure that the Midlothian area meets all National Ambient Air Quality Standards."

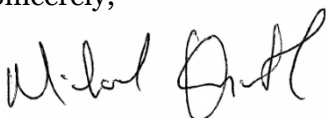
Another ATSDR recommendation with which we take issue is for additional air monitoring in the area. Not only is the entire state of Texas in compliance with the new NAAQS for SO<sub>2</sub>, but the Midlothian area has some of the lowest monitored levels in the state. The Dallas-Fort Worth area, which includes Midlothian, also has more than twice the required number of regulatory SO<sub>2</sub> monitors, and monitored levels over the last several years do not show any reason for health concern. Nor do they warrant diverting scarce monitoring resources from other areas of the state. In fact, while USEPA is requesting TCEQ to deploy 3 additional SO<sub>2</sub> monitors in Texas, none of them are in the DFW area reflecting the fact that there is no need for additional monitoring in Midlothian. If TCEQ were to add additional SO<sub>2</sub> monitors to our network, it

would be in areas with higher monitored levels, more significant SO<sub>2</sub> sources, and a denser population. This is also true for PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Therefore, we respectfully request that you remove the recommendation for additional monitoring in the Midlothian area as existing information clearly does not support this recommendation.

The last overarching concern we have is ATSDR's conclusion that "...breathing air contaminated with sulfur dioxide for short periods (5 minutes) could have harmed the health of sensitive individuals, particularly when performing an activity that raised their breathing rate." The rare, episodic, five-minute events ATSDR refers to occurred late at night when exposure was highly unlikely (11:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.). Further, according to the American Thoracic Society, the health effects that could have occurred are more accurately characterized as mild and reversible rather than harmful. We request that ATSDR better characterize any potential health effects, and evaluate their probability of occurring, in the executive summary and body of the HC rather than in an appendix, as your staff mentioned during the teleconference.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We look forward to working with you towards a mutually acceptable report. Please contact me at michael.honeycutt@tceq.texas.gov or 512-239-1793 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Michael Honeycutt, Ph.D.  
Director, Toxicology Division

CC (via e-mail):

Thomas Sinks – Deputy Director, ATSDR  
Tina Forrester – Acting Director, DCHI  
Alan Yarbrough – Acting Deputy Director, DCHI  
Sharon Williams-Fleetwood – Eastern Branch Chief  
Leah Graziano – New York Regional Director  
Gregory Ulirsch – Environmental Health Scientist  
Rick Gillig – Central Branch Chief  
March Johnson – Chicago Regional Director  
Michelle Colledge – Research Officer, Chicago Regional Representative  
George Pettigrew – Dallas Regional Director  
Jennifer Lyke – Public Health Advisor  
James Durant – Environmental Health Scientist  
Matthew Sones – Public Health Analyst  
Douglas Herlocker – Tetra Tech  
John Villanacci – DSHS Director of the Environmental Epidemiology and Toxicology Division