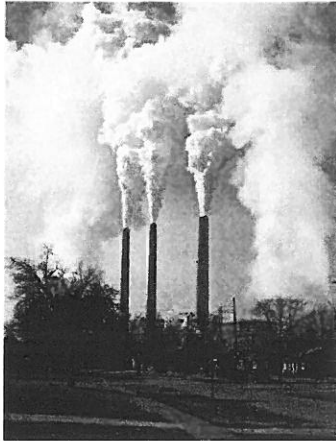


City's toxic butadiene emissions spiked in 2013

James Bruggers, jbruggers@courier-journal.com 6:12 a.m. EST January 26, 2015

Total toxic releases declined in Kentucky and Indiana, but locally, emissions of butadiene more than doubled from the previous year, while still far below what they had been a decade ago.



(Photo: C-J files)

Emissions of the cancer-causing chemical 1,3-butadiene doubled in Louisville in 2013 over the year before, but they still were substantially less than before the city enacted a new pollution control plan a decade ago.

"It's a spike, but it's not an alarming spike," Tom Nord Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District spokesman, said of the butadiene emissions. "Butadiene has been declining steeply" for many years, he added.


The numbers are found in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's database called the Toxics Release Inventory. Using industry-supplied information, the database tracks a large part but not all of the pollution that businesses send to the air, water or some type of landfill.

LG&E's Mill Creek power plant on Dixie Highway remained the biggest source such toxic releases in Jefferson County in 2013. But it showed a drop of 4 percent over 2012, and 18 percent less than in 2009 — numbers that include discharges of chemicals or metals into surface waters or ponds.


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EPA this month made public its inventory for 2013, the most current available, and Kentucky's total toxic releases declined from 83.7 million pounds in 2012 to 72.1 million pounds in 2013, a drop of about 14 percent.

Kentucky ranked 12th in the nation for total toxic releases, according to EPA.

Indiana's totals dipped 1 percent, from 154.6 million pounds to 153 million pounds over the same period.

Indiana ranked 5th among all the states.

Louisville and Jefferson County ranked 55th in the nation for most toxic releases, up one position from 2012. Total county releases in 2013 were at 9.5 million, down less than 1 percent from the previous year.

While the Kentucky and Indiana numbers declined, nationally there was a 15 percent increase in total disposal or other releases to the environment, EPA said, attributing that to a boost in metal mining. The agency said the long term trend nationally is more positive, with total disposal or other releases to the environment decreasing 7 percent over the last decade.

"We all have a right to know what toxic chemicals are being used and released into our environment, and what steps companies are taking to reduce their releases to the environment or, better yet, prevent waste from being generated in the first place." said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy in a news release.

Toxic air emissions, especially those from chemical companies in the Rubbertown area and LG&E power plants, have long been a concern in Louisville.

A risk study in 2003 identified 18 chemicals of concern and estimated the risk from long-term exposure at up to 690 additional cancer cases per 1 million people, compared to the city's general goal of nothing more than 1 in a million risk.

Butadiene was at the top of the list. The few chemical companies that emitted it, including the largest industrial source, American Synthetic Rubber, pledged to reduce their emissions. The city's Strategic Toxic Air Reduction Program adopted in 2005 by the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control Board also imposed new regulations targeting the 18 chemicals and others.

ASRC spokesman Tony Fouladpour explained the increase from 2012 to 2013 on the company's more stringent measurement of emissions, as well as leaks that contributed to a recent \$27,000 enforcement action by the air district.

Overall, he said, the plant has seen "a dramatic reduction" in its butadiene emissions since since the early 2000s, down about 90 percent. Since 2005, all industrial emissions in Jefferson County have declined about 75 percent.

Western Louisville resident Eboni Cochran, a leader of the group Rubbertown Emergency Action, said Louisville residents are still exposed to too much toxic air.

"The real question here," she said, "is will the city continue to be complicit in these environmental injustices, or will it direct APCD to aggressively seek to reduce our exposure to toxic chemicals?"

She also objected to the loss in 2013 of state funding for a program that monitored a variety of toxic chemicals in the air every 12 days for about 15 years, in addition to city efforts to measure other air pollution like ozone and soot.

"Toxic air monitoring not only validates what residents have been saying for decades but it should be the catalyst for creating effective policy to improve our lives by reducing our exposure to toxic chemicals," Cochran said.

Nord said his agency will probably look into the butadiene increase, "now that we have been alerted to it."

But he defended the city's effort to reduce toxic air emissions and said its work in that area will continue.

Nord also said his agency wants toxic chemical monitoring to return and is working through that with state officials and the West Jefferson County Community Task Force, which had been involved in the monitoring since the late 1990s.

Carl Hilton, executive director of the task force, said he and others are working to bring back it back, perhaps as early as this summer.

The EPA inventory identified LG&E's two coal-fired power plants as the largest sources of toxic releases to air, land or water.

Both the Mill Creek and Cane Run plants' total releases, at 4.6 million and 1.1 million tons, respectively, were down about 4 percent from 2012 to 2013, and even more since 2009.

Most of that pollution goes out the power plants' stacks.

"We are generating power cleaner than ever before," said Liz Pratt, spokeswoman for LG&E. It will improve even more with the "additional emission controls we're installing over the next several years at Mill Creek," and changes the company plans for Cane Run.

The Cane Run coal plant is scheduled to shut down this year and be replaced with a cleaner burning natural gas plant that is under construction.

Reach reporter James Bruggers at (502) 582-4645 or on Twitter @jbruggers.

Louisville's top ten for toxic releases:

Mill Creek power plant, 14660 Dixie Highway, 4.6 million pounds.

Cane Run power plant, 5252 Cane Run Road, 1.1 million pounds.

American Synthetic Rubber Co., 4500 Campground Road, 798,753 pounds.

American Synthetic Rubber Co., 4500 Campground Road, 798,753 pounds.

DuPont, 4200 Campground Road, 614,286.

Ford Kentucky Truck Plant, 3001 Chamberlain Lane, 532,502 pounds.

Louisville Packaging, 7745 National Turnpike, 332,358 pounds.

Momentive Specialty Chemicals, 6200 Campground Road, 284,511 pounds.

Clariant Corp., 1227 S. 12th St., 245,319 pounds.

Ford Louisville Assembly Plant, 2000 Fern Valley Road, 219,774.

Clariant Corp., 4900 Crittenden Drive, 214,178 pounds.

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Source: EPA

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