



Report: Ala.'s largest cities plagued by toxic air

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Air in Alabama's four largest cities contains enough dangerous chemicals to potentially endanger the health of thousands of people, according to a study released Monday by environmentalists.

The report, compiled by the Conservation Alabama Foundation, found excessive levels of toxic substances in the air in Birmingham, Mobile, Montgomery and Huntsville, said executive director Adam Snyder. Though smaller, Phenix City had the same problem, he said.

Of 15 chemicals that were studied, data showed levels in the air that were "far beyond" safety limits established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, he said. Thirteen of those substances have been linked to cancer.

Snyder said the study doesn't suggest that people leave metropolitan areas for health's sake.

"Our goal with this report is to elevate the issue so something can be done with it," he said. "We want the state to do something to clean up the air."

The report also doesn't conclude that five cities are the only ones in the state with air pollution problems, Snyder said: Those are just the only places where monitoring has been conducted.

"There could be more out there. We just don't have the data," he said.

The Alabama Department of Environmental Management said it had a copy of the study.

"We will review the report, but any comment other than that would be premature," said Jerome Hand, a spokesman for the agency in Montgomery.

The study analyzed pollution data collected by the state; by Jefferson County's health agency; and by a group of public and private groups that performed air monitoring in Mobile County in 2002 and 2003.

David A. Ludder, an environmental attorney who compiled the report, said results showed that people living near each of the sites were exposed to air toxics that were as much as 9,504 percent above federal limits.

The Conservation Alabama Foundation wants the state environmental commission to enact rules that require the monitoring of air in communities, Ludder said. EPA standards used by the state focus on monitoring plant emissions rather than air quality in neighborhoods, he said.

"The EPA rules never consider the effect of all these plants put together," said Ludder.

The study focused on chemicals including arsenic, benzene, chloroform, formaldehyde and naphthalene.

While the report did not draw a direct link between air pollution and cancer, it said the Alabama Department of Environmental Management could reduce risk of cancer in the state by enacting rules to reduce the amount of cancer-causing pollutants in the air.

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