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Non-Attainment

Knox County air quality fails new EPA standards

There is an unseen danger in Knox County—one that clouds our vision in a film of smog, causes breathing complications and irritates other respiratory problems. It will also inevitably and indirectly cause increases in utility costs and raise taxes of local businesses.

PM2.5s (particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter), also known as microscopic particles of dust, smoke or soot, are emitted and formed by photochemical reactions in the atmosphere every day and, despite their size, pose enormous threats to the environment and the quality of health in the area. The Environmental Protection Agency is implementing a new National Ambient Air Quality Standard on Nov. 17, which Knox County is not in compliance with, therefore classifying it as non-attainment. The amount of PM2.5s in Knox County's atmosphere, on average from 2000-2002, surpasses the limit set by the EPA by 3.4 points, meaning we have about 20 percent more PM2.5s in the atmosphere than permitted by the new EPA standard.

"Knox County is not in attainment for this new standard, and it also does not meet attainment standards for ozone level. We're caught, and there's no way to avoid it at this point," says Dr. Wayne Davis, Chair of the Knox County Air Pollution Control Board.

Not only are our health, air quality and pocketbooks affected by PM2.5s, but they may also affect the local economy. According to Davis, the fact that Knox County falls under the category of non-attainment for this standard could discourage new industries from moving to Knoxville.

For example, Hamilton County, which did not originally meet attainment for a similar EPA standard placed on ozone levels in the atmosphere, took part in an Early Action Compact, which allowed it to take preliminary steps to lower ozone levels and avert a non-attainment status before the EPA standard for ozone was implemented. Unfortunately there is no such option for the new PM2.5 standard. If a new business were to move to Knox County, it would be required to offset emissions, forcing new businesses to make negotiations with existing businesses in which the latter would reduce their PM2.5 emissions in proportion to what the new business is projected to put out. This could make nearby counties that meet attainment standards more appealing to businesses in search of a



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Seven Days

Wednesday, Oct. 20

- Local residents and officials review a new plan for traffic calming in Knoxville. Funny, but we thought there was already a pretty effective traffic calming program in place. It's called the Department of Transportation.

Thursday, Oct. 21

- In an interview, disgraced, big-spending former University of Tennessee president John Shumaker says his ouster from UT in 2003 can be attributed to media sensationalizing and a lack of support from fellow administrators. That whiny, vaguely tuneful noise you hear is the sound of the world's smallest violin, playing sad songs for Shu.

Friday, Oct. 22

- Medical examiners suspend a local physician for a number of alleged health and safety violations, including his reuse of disposable otoscope covers, and his practice of sterilizing vaginal specula in a Crock Pot using household disinfectant. Inspectors say they first grew suspicious of the doctor's health practices when they

new location, in turn crippling Knox County's economic development.

"Let's say Blount or Anderson County meets the attainment standard, then the business may decide to move there. Our city planners lose," Davis says.

The EPA typically gives a three- to four-year time span to meet attainment guidelines. If these guidelines are not met within the designated time, the EPA imposes federal penalties and takes money away from transportation funding.

Although Knox County marginally classifies as non-attainment for the fine particulate standard, there is still a lot of to work to be done to ensure re-attainment in the future for this standard and for ozone emissions as well.

Emission reductions are costly and will not solve the problem alone. Other options being considered for air quality improvement include speed-limit controls, inspection and maintenance of vehicles, and prohibition of burning on construction sites.

"Inspection and maintenance of vehicles have been looked at unfavorably in this area. It is too costly to register vehicles, and the ones who are impacted are the ones with older cars: the elderly, students and people with low incomes," Davis says.

"There are approximately 125,000 vehicles traveling through Knoxville each day, 25,000 of which are transfer trucks, that would not be inspected if vehicle registration for inspection and maintenance was enforced," he adds.

Dr. Prakash Doraiswamy, Environmental Engineer and Air Pollution Researcher at the University of Tennessee, adds that fuel standards will be altered to lower sulfur in diesel in gasoline, which will have a marginal effect on this problem's outcome.

Emissions are not the only way PM_{2.5}s become a part of our atmosphere, Doraiswamy says. "More than 50 percent of PM_{2.5}s are formed, not emitted, from gases through reactions in the atmosphere," he says. Sources of ambient PM_{2.5} emissions include power plants, exhaust and road dust from mobile sources, such as cars and trucks, and non-road mobile sources, such as trains, planes and lawnmowers, agricultural sources and industries.

Although air quality has been a problem in this area for decades, the same rules of conservation hold true in this scenario. "Where the public's role comes in to control it (PM_{2.5} emissions) is to save energy, limit the number of car trips you take or walk whenever possible," Doraiswamy says.

—Melissa Elkins

next to the commode.

Saturday, Oct. 23

• Reports say that members of a Wackenhut security team at the Oak Ridge Y-12 weapons plant almost started shooting at one another as a result of confusion over a training exercise. The source of the problem is revealed when officials discover that Wackenhut training videos have been mixed in with a collection of old Three Stooges episodes.

Sunday, Oct. 24

• The *News Sentinel* reports that the annual economic impact of UT athletics is roughly \$1,000 for every fan in Neyland Stadium on a given Saturday. That figure may be significantly reduced, however, since the data was collected *before* Shumaker stopped coming to games.

Monday, Oct. 25

• Four area neighborhood groups ask Knox County Commission to halt the sale of the old Farmers' Market property to the Target Corporation. Some group members say they've had nasty visions of a new farmers' market that sells cheap shoes, right next to the perfume counter.

Tuesday, Oct. 26

• A convicted child rapist tells a local judge that his jail cell is too cold. The judge tells him to enjoy the respite while he can; his future accommodations will involve a locale with plenty of heat.

Street Talk

John Werner II
Director of Finance,
Knox County



Facelift

Historic Tennessee Theatre returns to its former glitz and glamour

The historic Tennessee Theatre, still three months away from completion, is already looking radiant in its new embellishments—from the glimmering colors of the facades to the intricate scalloped moldings. Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale called the renovation “a sterling example of what we can do when we pull together as a community,” as he presented a \$1.5 million check to Bruce Hartmann, president of the Historic Tennessee Theatre Foundation on Tuesday, Oct. 26.

The check, presented on the theater’s mezzanine balcony before an audience of several hard-hat-clad county commissioners, was the final installment of Knox County’s \$6 million contribution to the effort. Hartmann, publisher of the *News Sentinel*, acknowledges this contribution as a crucial chunk of the \$23.5 million goal for the entire project. Though still \$300,000 short of this projection, he says, “I’m confident we are going to be able to raise that through private contributions.”

Much of this massive budget went to the remodeled backstage area, which, at several times its former size, will better accommodate future productions at the theater. Even so, audience members are more likely to swoon at the surface renovations. Though the visual changes are clearly evident in the brighter, glossier sheen of the theater’s interior, Hartmann assures that nearly all of the original 1928 facades and materials were kept intact, saying, “the only places we had to replace were badly damaged by water.” The decadent original chandeliers, though shrouded in protective cloth, are back in place, looming overhead in the entry hall after being sent off for refurbishing.

The most striking visual difference in the theater, by far, are the brilliant colors adorning its glittering surfaces that were once dim with antiquity. The theater’s technical director, Tim Burns, credits the historic contractors of Evergreen Studios in New York with accurately preserving the original colors. “They have such experience that this was pretty much routine for them. They came in and analyzed what colors were there in 1928 and then replicated them,” he says.

With a few unfinished surfaces still exposed and a gaping absence of seats, there looks to be a lot of work left in order to complete renovations for the theater’s projected opening in January. Burns says all that remains is to “install theatrical systems, seats, and continue finishing surfaces...more or less, we’re icing the cake.” Still, he admits there may be a crunch for time, stating, “It’s going to be a horse race to the finish line, but Denark is dedicated to finishing on time.”



What do you see as the county’s mission?

Mayor Ragsdale has been very clear about our mission; every school a great school, services for our senior citizens, economic development and continually making government better everyday.

How does the proposed wheel tax play into fulfilling that mission?

Everything has its price. Government, particularly good government, is no exception. It was not an easy decision for Mayor Ragsdale to ask for more revenue, but the reality is that it costs money to make the vision a reality.

Do you believe that the wheel tax will pass?

I certainly hope so. Currently, we are blessed with progressive leadership in both the city and the county. That makes this a time unlike any in recent memory, when we can really drive this community forward. But progress does have a price tag. My hope is that, ultimately, the majority of Knox Countians will show pride in our community by funding the Mayor’s budget through an increase in the wheel tax.

Meet Your City

KNOXVILLE TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Thursday, Oct. 28
3 p.m.
City County Building
Main Assembly Room
400 Main St.

BETTER BUILDING BOARD

Thursday, Oct. 28
3:30 p.m.
City County Building

Small Assembly Room
400 Main St.

October 28, 2004 • Vol. 14, No. 44
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