



EUGENE, Ore. — The Lane Regional Air Protection Agency is trying to clear the air over a recent complaint.

Beyond Toxics filed an official complaint against LRAPA. It is upset over the decision to allow a power plant to increase its pollution in west Eugene.

The complaint stems from a recent decision regarding particulate emissions from Seneca Sustainable Energy on Highway 99, but it is just one reason west Eugene residents in neighborhoods are concerned.

People KEZI 9 News spoke with say if you just step outside their homes, you'll see why.

Joanne Gross lives just down the street from a few factories, and the proximity has raised concerns over the years, including a daily occurrence on her husband's bike commute to work.

"He noticed he would get rained on by the factory's plumes...what's been coming out of the stack, and that was gross," said west Eugene resident Joanne Gross.

Those concerns also raised eyebrows with Beyond Toxics, a Eugene-based environmental group.

"Beyond Toxics has responded to a number of requests from the neighborhoods in west Eugene for many years. People out there are concerned about the high level of air pollution," said Lisa Arkin, Beyond Toxics executive director.

The group recently filed an official complaint against LRAPA, saying its recent decision to allow a power plant to increase its emissions disproportionately impacts the health of minority and low-income residents in west Eugene.

The group also says the fine particulate matter is highly dangerous to human health and cited a recent study that showed children's asthma rates in the area were almost twice the state average.

“There are other bigger factors that are based on indoor air quality. Lifestyle, pollen, air pollution can exacerbate asthma that part is clear, but as far as a driver for what's causing asthma, that's confusing the issue,” said Merlyn Hough, LRAPA executive director.

LRAPA says the information the group used is too narrow, and overall, air quality throughout the area has actually improved over the years. But Gross says the matter isn't just about the air quality anymore.

“I know that Seneca when they opened up, they made a lot of promises and it's not just about pollution, it was about a broken promise,” Gross said.

LRAPA also says just because it was approved, it doesn't necessarily mean the company is going to increase its amounts of emissions.

The group wants to the decision to be invalidated. It wants LRAPA to be required to do more studies on the impact of factories in neighborhoods and possibly revoke some federal funding from the agency.

Beyond Toxics expects to hear some sort of decision in the coming months.

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