

Seneca plant is affecting air quality – Letter to the Editor (Eugene Register-Guard)

In response to Richard Re's Aug. 18 column, I feel compelled to comment on the effect of Seneca's biomass facility on the west Eugene community ("Seneca cogeneration plant gets bad rap for its pollution control").

A team of volunteers has been canvassing west Eugene neighborhoods over the past several weeks, conducting an environmental health survey. The canvassers don't mention Seneca, yet time after time we hear complaints from residents about air quality in the neighborhood and its impacts on their health.

It's no secret that the Seneca facility emits carbon monoxide, acetaldehyde and particulate matter, among other pollutants. Much of the particulate matter consists of particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, known as PM2.5.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognizes particles of that size as posing the greatest health risk because their small size makes them capable of lodging deep in human lungs when inhaled from the air.

Notably, many residents who've been surveyed suffer from asthma. One resident uses her prescription inhaler four or five times a day; she wasn't asthmatic before moving to west Eugene. Another resident told us a neighbor recently moved away because her asthma had become so severe. When we asked residents if they believed the air quality in the area was causing their asthma, almost everyone said "Yes," and pointed in the direction of the Seneca facility.

I urge Seneca to take our community's health into consideration as it applies for a new permit allowing a sizable increase in toxic emissions.

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