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Smog in Bucks likes hanging out above lower-income river towns

The confluence of prevailing winds, major highways and industrial sites makes the area along the Delaware River in Lower Bucks County a depository for much of the region's air pollution.

By KYLE BAGENSTOSE
STAFF WRITER

Part 2 of a 4-part series

It was unusually hot for early April in Bristol Borough, and Joe Krause was catching a breather before mowing his last lawn of the day.

The 57-year-old, lifelong borough resident sat on a shady bench in front of the Hibernian Club and didn't seem too concerned with the quality of the air around him.

"I don't think it's too bad," Krause said. "Years ago, when they had that mosquito guy running around (spraying for mosquitoes) ... it was bad."

After giving it a little more thought, he remembered a few exceptions. There was the time in 2012 when the nearby Dow Chemical plant — formerly Rohm and Haas — caught fire, and a few other occasions when the authorities gave word to people in the neighborhood to shelter in place due to air pollution.

"Not too long ago, we had to close our windows because they told us, 'Keep your windows shut and don't go outside,'" Krause recalled.

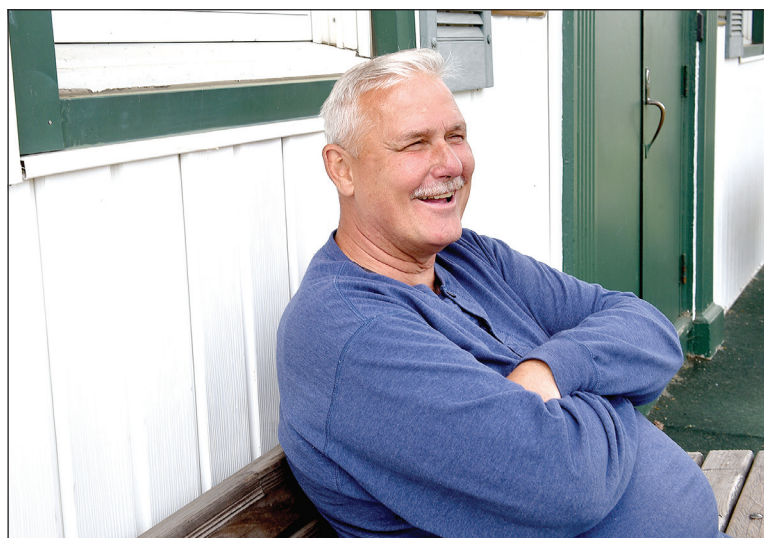
Plus, there are all the cars, he added.

"A lot of traffic problems from people going from here to Croydon, people going across the Bristol-Burlington Bridge," he said. "It's a pain in the (butt)."

Then there's that other thing: his diagnosis of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. COPD is a catch-all term for a variety of respiratory conditions, including emphysema and asthma. Both can cause abnormal shortness of breath, frequent coughing and wheezing.

"(The air) doesn't seem to be affecting it that much," Krause said. "It's not irritating me."

But just over a mile away is evidence



KIM WEIMER / PHOTOJOURNALIST

Bristol Borough resident Joe Krause, who has been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, can recall incidents of bad air pollution.

that the area's air quality could, in fact, be harming the lungs of area residents like Krause. Tucked behind Franklin D. Roosevelt Middle School in Bristol Township is a small, nondescript shack surrounded by a fence. Peering closer reveals a sign identifying the structure as an air quality monitoring station belonging to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

The station is one of 53 in the state, each one positioned strategically to monitor conditions in areas known for air pollution. State records show the Bristol station consistently has the highest readings in Pennsylvania for a harmful air pollutant called ozone, more commonly

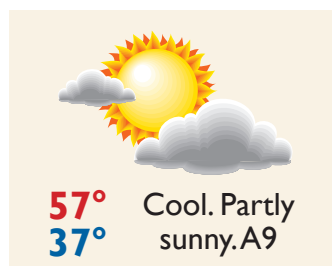
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Data from a state Department of Environmental Protection air monitoring station behind Franklin D. Roosevelt Middle School in Bristol Township shows Lower Bucks County has more smog than anywhere in Pennsylvania.

CHLOE ELMER / PHOTOJOURNALIST



Stenhouse blows past Busch to win in Talladega.
NASCAR, B1



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Planned bullying policy debated in Pennsbury

By CHRIS ENGLISH
STAFF WRITER

A proposed bullying/cyberbullying policy for the Pennsbury School District has school board members and parents debating whether it — and measures the district has taken to prevent the practices — are extensive enough.

The school board is tentatively scheduled to vote on the new policy at Thursday night's meeting. School board members, administrators and parents went back and forth on the subject at a recent meeting.

The proposed policy isn't drastically different from the current one, but adds a specific definition for cyberbullying as the "intentional and repeated mistreatment of others through the use of technology, such as: computers, cell phones and other electronic devices."

The proposed policy also removes a list of possible disciplinary measures for those who bully or cyberbully because they're already in Pennsbury's student code of conduct handbook, school district officials said.

Among other provisions, the proposed policy — like the current one — encourages students to promptly report instances of bullying or cyberbullying and states that "complaints of bullying shall be investigated promptly, and

corrective action shall be taken when allegations are verified. Confidentiality of all parties shall be maintained, consistent with the school district's legal and investigative obligations. No reprisals or retaliation shall occur as a result of good faith reports of bullying."

Falls resident John Quinn, who said his daughter was the recent victim of cyberbullying, said at the meeting that he has concerns about the way the matter is being handled. He said his daughter, a junior at Pennsbury High School and a diabetic, had a social media posting directed at her from another junior girl telling Quinn's daughter to "go take insulin and go kill yourself."

Quinn said he understood the girl who made the post is still on the cheerleading squad and still being allowed to attend the senior prom.

School district spokeswoman Ann Langtry said she couldn't comment on whether those claims are accurate. "The district cannot comment on personal student matters," she said.

"I'm not seeing anything concrete being done as a deterrent (to bullying)," said Quinn.

Another Falls resident, Pamela McGrath, said her ninth-grade son at Pennsbury High School was the

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COURTESY OF COMCAST

Comcast xFi, integrated with its X1 cable TV platform, allows users to view and control Wi-Fi-connected devices on their television, using X1's voice remote.

Comcast launching new Wi-Fi platform

By CRISSA SHOEMAKER DEBREE
STAFF WRITER

Comcast is rolling out a new Wi-Fi platform that it says will make it easier for customers to set up, troubleshoot and control their wireless internet settings from their computers, mobile devices and TV remotes.

Want to ban devices from the dinner table? Just set dinner mode, and Wi-Fi

will be shut off for an hour and a half each night. Want to binge-watch Netflix on your tablet in your bedroom? You can find out if you have enough bandwidth there — and how to get more if you don't.

Available Monday to more than 10 million customers nationwide, Xfinity xFi is meant to be wireless

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Pollution

Continued from Page A1

known as smog.

The Environmental Protection Agency says smog forms when “pollutants emitted by cars, power plants, industrial boilers, refineries, chemical plants and other sources react chemically in the presence of sunlight.” In other words, Lower Bucks’ concentration of highways, chemical plants, energy generation facilities and other industrial sites make a perfect recipe for smog.

While many people may think of smog as just a hazy cloud, it poses a health risk. Chronic inhalation of smog can irritate the respiratory system, reduce lung function, aggravate asthma and damage the lining of the lungs, according to the EPA. Continual exposure can also affect development in the lungs of children, harming them later in life, and speeding up the natural aging process of adults, the EPA says.

The American Lung Association goes further, stating that, “Even low levels of ozone may be deadly.” Citing a study on health effects in communities that meet EPA smog standards, the association wrote, “Researchers found that ozone at those lower levels was associated with deaths from cardiovascular disease, strokes and respiratory causes.”

The Pennsylvania DEP says the source of Lower Bucks’ smog is complex. Prevailing winds blow from the west and southwest, leaving Lower Bucks downwind of pollution in Philadelphia and beyond. Emissions from heavy traffic on I-95, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and Routes 1 and 13 add to the problem.

Environmental injustice?

Bensalem native Mike Ewall, 42, is worried about who in Bucks County is breathing in all those pollutants. He’s especially concerned for those living closest to industrial sites in communities along Route 13.

Ewall, a Bensalem High School graduate, is the founder and director of the Energy Justice Network, an organization dedicated to pursuing environmental justice across the country. The issue, he said, is that studies have found communities of color are often the ones that bear the brunt of waste facilities and other pollution sources.

“By race, we find that (living) within one mile of (waste incinerators), it’s 55 percent white,” Ewall said of the national average. “However, the average white population in the country is about 64 percent. So (these facilities are) disproportionately impacting people of color.”

U.S. Census Bureau data show the pattern holds true for neighbors of industrial sites in Falls, Tullytown and Bristol Township.

In New Jersey, directly across the river from the massive waste disposal facilities in Falls and Tullytown, are Bordentown Township, Fieldsboro and Florence — neighborhoods with black populations well above Burlington County averages. Farther to the south, near Dow and the Arkema Co., are Bristol Borough neighborhoods that are home to some of the largest black populations in predominantly white Bucks County.

According to Drexel University sociology professor



KIM WEIMER / PHOTOJOURNALIST

(File) Tullytown and the Falls neighborhoods near the GROWS Landfill and Wheelabrator incinerator have white populations that meet or exceed the county average, but the median household income falls below.



CONTRIBUTED

Studies have found communities of color are often the ones that bear the brunt of pollution sources, according to Bensalem native Mike Ewall. He is the founder and director of the Energy Justice Network, an organization dedicated to pursuing environmental justice across the country.

Diane Sicotte, there’s more to the story.

She’s studied environmental justice issues around the country and said the Delaware Valley is more complex than other regions, in large part because of the region’s long history of industrial and suburban growth. When she analyzed the region’s industry-heavy communities to see what they had in common — race, income, geography — she said proximity to the Delaware River was what kept popping up.

“The pattern is not as simple (as race); it’s very complex,” Sicotte said. “I found more middle-class communities (locally) that were extensively burdened (by industry).”

One of the reasons, Sicotte said, is because of the growth of engineered suburbs such as Levittown, which notably had rules against selling homes to black people in its early years. The community spreads over four municipalities: Bristol Township, Falls, Middletown and Tullytown.

“What you had was a white-restricted, industrial community,” Sicotte said. “While it was operating, they had to live with that pollution. And then after (industry) left, that left them with a bunch of industrially zoned land.”

Data show that it isn’t just predominantly black neighborhoods near the industrial sites in Lower Bucks. Neighborhoods immediately west of Dow and Arkema, near Croydon, closely match Bucks County’s overall white demographic. Tullytown and the Falls neighborhoods immediately north of the GROWS Landfill and Wheelabrator incinerator have white populations that meet or exceed the county average.

Black or white,

something else ties together many of the residents living near industrial sites: their income. No ZIP code is affected more than 19007, which encompasses all of Bristol Borough and most of Tullytown, and is sandwiched between the Dow Chemical plant to the south and landfills to the north.

Median household income in that ZIP is just shy of \$44,000 annually, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That’s the second lowest among all Bucks ZIP codes, behind only an unusual 18081 ZIP code, the 300-person Springtown section of Springfield Township in Upper Bucks.

Back in Lower Bucks, EPA data show approximately 51,000 pounds of toxic pollution were released into the air from facilities located in 19007 in 2014, the most recent year for which data is available. That’s more than 42 percent of the county’s total toxic emissions, even though 19007 contains just 3 percent of the county’s population and 0.3 percent of its land area.

On the other side of the river, across from Dow, are Burlington County’s lowest and third-lowest income tracts. In the first, about 2,400 Burlington City residents have a median household income of \$36,000; in the second, the same number has a median household income of \$45,000.

Looking at Bucks County as a whole, in ZIP codes that are above Bucks County’s median household income of about \$76,000, only 17 percent of the county’s total toxic releases occurred. That compares to 83 percent of tracked toxic emissions in ZIP codes below the county median income.

In other words, the data show, the further Bucks families sink below the county’s median income, the more likely they are to live near a facility that releases toxic emissions.

Krause, from his bench outside the Hibernian Club in Bristol Borough, looked over a graphic showing the disparity between the chemical releases occurring in his home ZIP code, compared to those where a typical household is pulling in six figures a year in places such as Newtown Borough and Upper Makefield.

“That’s a chart and a half, ain’t it,” he said. “Kinda crazy.”

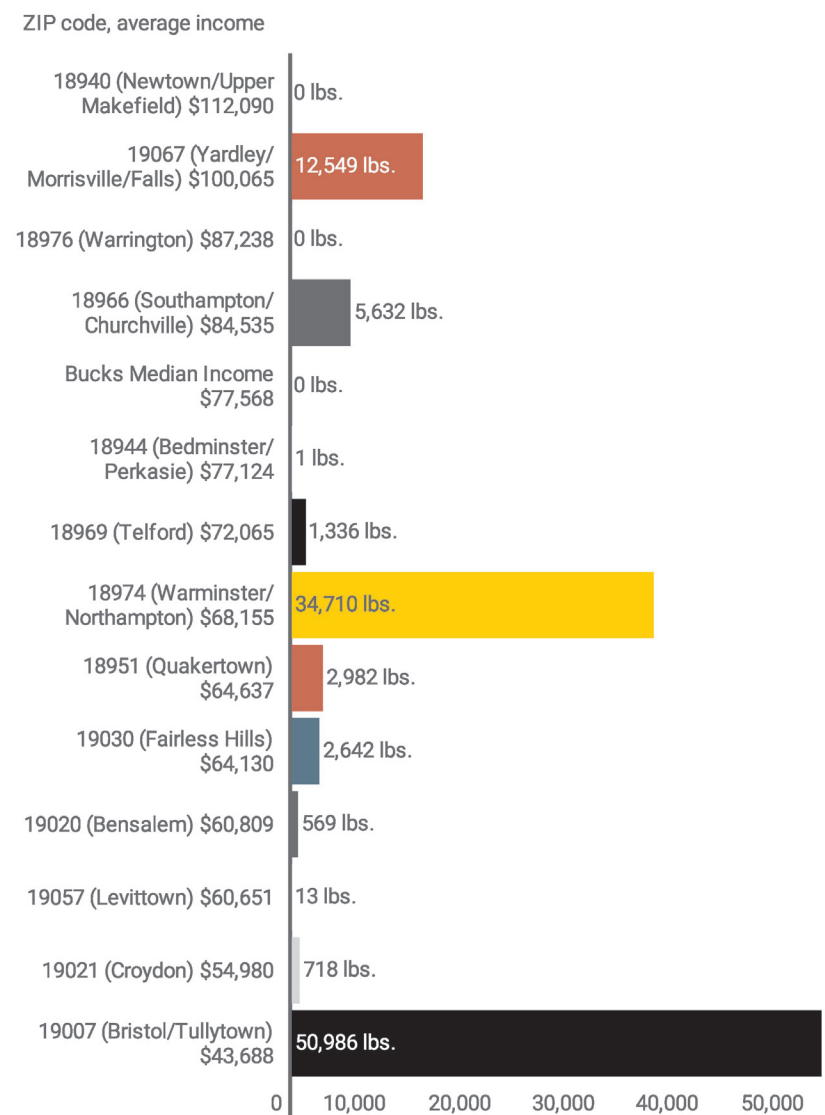
Break over, he rose from the bench and pushed his lawnmower around the corner, off to mow the last lawn of the day in the warm Bristol Borough air.

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Less money, more toxic emissions

Thirteen Bucks County ZIP Codes have industrial facilities tracked on the EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory. The inventory tracks how much toxic material is released from each plant annually. Data from 2014, the last year available, shows the vast majority of releases occurs in ZIP codes that are below the county’s median income. The lowest income ZIP code accounts for 42 percent of the entire county’s emissions.

Toxins released to environment



Sources: EPA Toxic Release Inventory data for 2014; 2011-2015 American Community Survey’s five-year estimates

TODAY

COURIER TIMES

57°

37°

Cool. Partly sunny.

LOTTERIES Sun., 5-7-17

NEW JERSEY	PENNSYLVANIA
Pick 3: 2-9-1, Fireball: 9 Pick 4: 2-0-2-6, Fireball: 9 Cash 5: 4-13-23-30-38 Xtra: 3 Midday Pick 3: 5-7-7, Fireball: 3 Midday Pick 4: 7-9-5-9, Fireball: 3 5 Card Cash:	Pick 2 Day: 5-6, Wild: 9 Pick 2 Evening: 8-5, Wild: 3 Pick 3 Day: 0-1-0, Wild: 9 Pick 3 Evening: 5-3-4, Wild: 3 Pick 4 Day: 0-5-8-4, Wild: 9 Pick 4 Evening: 4-9-9-2, Wild: 3 Pick 5 Day: 2-0-4-0-4, Wild: 9 Pick 5 Evening: 2-4-1-3-9, Wild: 3 Cash 5: 3-7-11-22-28 Treasure Hunt: 1-2-4-12-16

MULTI-STATE LOTTERIES

Thur., 5-4-17 Cash4Life: 1-2-17-24-38 4	Fri., 5-5-17 Mega Millions: 4-23-33-47-53 7	Sat., 5-6-17 Powerball: 11-21-31-41-59 21
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ONLINE POLLS

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What interests you more, the NHL playoffs or the NBA playoffs?

NBA 24%
NHL 76%

Vote in our latest poll

Do you intend to vote in the May 16 primary election?

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