



# Report cites cancer risks in 7 Ohio counties

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**COLUMBUS** - Seven Ohio counties have slightly higher-than-acceptable cancer risks from air pollution, according to a state agency study.

Hamilton County was one of the seven, but a local expert says there's no cause for alarm in the data, which looked at levels of volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, and heavy metals.

"Overall, it doesn't look like there's anything to really panic about," said James Lockey, an occupational pulmonologist and environmental health expert at the University of Cincinnati.

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency released a study Wednesday that says Columbiana, Jefferson and Washington counties in eastern Ohio; Marion County in central Ohio; Hamilton and Montgomery counties in southwest Ohio; and Scioto County in southern Ohio were identified after 10 years of monitoring.

"In Hamilton County, the main risk is from benzene, and that's a component of gasoline, so it's a reflection of auto traffic," Lockey said.

The data seemed to reflect that between 2006 and 2010 levels of many of the pollutants declined, Lockey said, which is a good sign.

"I would use this data to say this is where we are today, and let's continue to do what we can to lower exposures in the future, and by lowering exposures in the future, you tend to protect sensitive subgroups, such as children and the elderly," he said.

"This is a pretty good report for Hamilton County, and it's better than it was before. There's

nothing here that's alarming."

The Ohio EPA examined data from air monitors in 16 counties that check for toxic organic compounds and heavy metals, mostly emitted by cars and other mobile sources. Data were collected in Hamilton County in Reading and on the Cincinnati State Technical and Community College in Clifton.

The U.S. EPA considers acceptable a risk level of fewer than 1 in 10,000 additional cancers associated with constantly breathing an air pollutant.

The other nine counties had cancer risks considered acceptable, officials said.

In Hamilton County, the cancer risk was 1.12 cancers per 10,000 people. Risks in the remaining six counties ranged from a risk of 1.01 cancers per 10,000 people in Scioto County to 2.1 cancers per 10,000 people in Columbiana County.

The report identified areas that may require further agency action, such as helping with voluntary reduction efforts and compliance with new federal standards, Ohio EPA Director Chris Korleski said in a statement Wednesday.

EPA toxicologist Paul Koval said the report offers

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a statewide summary of data that has been available publicly for years, the Columbus Dispatch reported. Koval said the agency has been working with the individual areas all along.

Environmental advocates said they have never seen those risk estimates.

Teresa Mills, director of the Buckeye Environmental Network, said she has watched the agency's air-monitoring reports for 10 years and does not believe most communities and environmental groups knew of the risk numbers.

"They are a concern, and we want to know what the EPA is going to do with the data to lower risks," Mills said Thursday.

Koval said the data provide a baseline that the EPA could use for future tests and efforts to reduce pollution.

*Enquirer reporter Peggy O'Farrell contributed.*

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