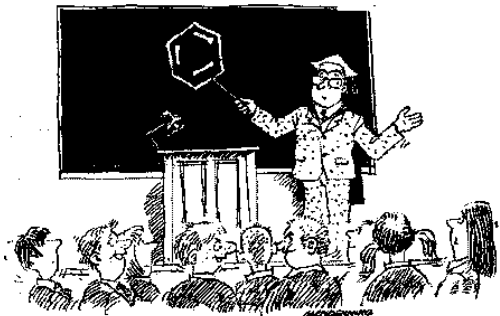


Environmental Standard

Welcome to the latest issue of the City of Houston's environmental e-Newsletter. We thank you for your continued interest in the activities and initiatives of the City of Houston in

regards to our environment. This issue features the following: a look at the "Houston Regional Benzene Air Pollution Reduction: A Voluntary Plan for Major Sources," recent rankings on Houston's sustainability, and a new face to the City's environmental website.

Houston Regional Benzene Air Pollution Reduction: A Voluntary Plan for Major Sources



Houston's air quality has been a concern for quite some time. We have come a long way over the last 30 years due to the Clean Air Act, but air quality must be better.

We asked scientists to evaluate those chemicals in the air that pose significant health risks, and those that do not. We want to target the worst chemicals for reduction. Benzene currently occupies the position of top priority due to the

amount emitted and proximity to the populace.

Our approach for reduction is practical. It is based on voluntary reductions to levels defined by scientific health-based criteria, and not merely regulation for regulation's sake. Our approach does not demonize an entire industry. Rather, a cleaner industry will face fewer hurdles to expansion in our region, without endangering public health.

This voluntary benzene reduction plan is the first of its kind. It focuses on the reduction of benzene from major sources.

Benzene is well established as a carcinogen. When benzene is present in the ambient air, people who breathe the air are at increased risk for developing cancer.

The reduction strategies in this plan will simultaneously reduce emissions and/or ambient air concentrations of six additional air pollutants that pose definite health risks according to the Health Effects of Air Pollution Task Force: ozone, fine particles, diesel particulate matter, 1,3-butadiene, formaldehyde and acrolein.

The Problem

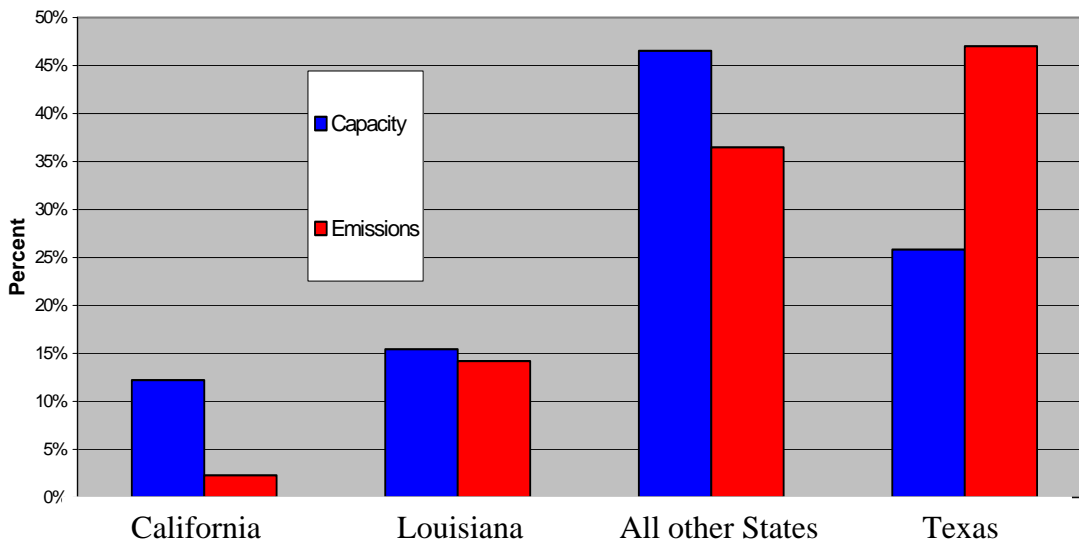
The graph below illustrates the significance of the problem that Houston faces.

In the state of Texas, the petroleum refining capacity is approximately 26%, however, the State produces approximately 47% of the total U.S. benzene emissions related to petroleum refining.

Compare this to California, which has a capacity of approximately 12% refining and produce only approximately 3% of the emissions. Or Louisiana, which has a capacity of approximately 15% refining and produces approximately 14% of the emissions.

Consequently, the graph illustrates that the dirtiest of refining is occurring in the state of Texas

Percent of Total US Refining Capacity and Total US Benzene Emissions Related to Petroleum Refining (SIC 29) 2005



This Regional Benzene Reduction Plan is necessary because there is no legal or regulatory framework in place at the state or federal level to ensure that ambient levels of benzene in the neighborhoods, in which we live and work, are maintained at healthful levels.

The state of Texas has the authority to set standards for and to regulate ambient levels of benzene, as several other states have done, but the state has not done so to date. A regulatory structure that effectively limited the ambient level of benzene could result in significant consequences for industrial facilities, as

have ozone standards. In the absence of a state or federal framework, which could be draconian, and outside of the adversarial context of costly litigation, the voluntary cooperation of the largest emitters of benzene is the most expedient mechanism for obtaining significant reductions in ambient levels of benzene over the next five years.

A regional task force comprised of representatives of industry, environmental groups, citizens, and health care professionals are working diligently to address the City's proposed plan by the first week in May.

Recent Rankings on Houston's Sustainability

SustainLane Government, a premier online knowledge base for sharing best practices for sustainability, has ranked Houston as a "runner-up" in their recent study for clean technology. This is a reflection of the many initiatives undertaken by the city in the past three years. The City was also ranked fourth for the most active city on SustainLane's

website. Houston has more "sustainability best practices" in SustainLane's knowledge base than any other governmental entity.

While SustainLane will not be doing a city ranking on sustainability this year, watch for the 2008 ranking, which should have positive results for Houston.

City of Houston's Environmental Web Page Gets a Facelift

If you have not seen the new website, please take some time and surf around. You can access the environmental web page from the City's home page, click the residents' tab and select environment, or type in

<http://www.houstontx.gov/environment/index.html>

In an effort to make the site more user friendly, and to be more informative, several new sections and features have been added.

Last Issue

Our last issue was the inaugural issue of the *Environmental Standard*; we introduced the Mayor's Office of Environmental Programming by providing a brief overview of the organizational structure, and introduced our staff.

To view past issues of the *Environmental Standard*, log onto our website and select e-Newsletters from the left column, from there you can select which issue you would like to view.

Do you have an environmental question or comment for us?
If so please email us at envcomments@cityofhouston.net