



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ conducts air toxics study to verify historical data

BATON ROUGE – In an effort to reassure Louisiana residents that there are no toxic air hot spots near schools, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality conducted a study of air toxics at or near a number of schools throughout the state. These schools were listed in the first percentile of all schools (meaning that the air quality around the school was potentially the worst in the nation) as part of a USA Today newspaper series on air toxics. The articles indicated that, based on a screening model known as Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators, or RSEI, these schools were ranked high on potential exposure to air toxics. RSEI cannot say definitively whether anyone is at risk, but identifies places where industrial pollution might pose problems.

DEQ has a network of 21 monitors capable of monitoring for air toxics. The monitors are set up throughout the state, with 11 in the most industrialized part of the state (known as the Capitol Region). Based on the monitoring data from these sites, along with the usual permitting and inspection phases of environmental regulation, DEQ has not seen any signs of toxic hot spots near schools or otherwise. If a problem were ever to develop, DEQ has tools such as its Mobile Air Monitoring Laboratory and other air sampling equipment to quickly address any possible situation.

Schools ranked in the first percentile by the USA Today article were surveyed for ambient air quality with particular emphasis on air toxics. These schools included Wyandotte Early Learning Center and Istrouma High School, Baton Rouge; A. L. Smith Elementary, Sterlington; Destrehan High School in Destrehan; and S.P. Arnett Middle, Western Heights Elementary, and Vincent Settlement Elementary in Calcasieu Parish. Air toxic data from the Chalmette High School monitoring site in St. Bernard Parish, and soil and water samples for nickel in Calcasieu Parish were also reviewed. In addition to air sampling and data reviews, air quality modeling was studied for A.L. Smith Elementary.

The conclusion, based on the analyses performed, is the air at the schools studied meets all known health and safety standards. Although the RSEI model ranks the potential for harmful exposure to air toxics at some Louisiana schools to be high, actual exposure to air toxics at the schools in this study has been shown to be low and well within healthy limits by the use of scientifically accepted sampling and analysis methods. The Department relies on its 21 monitors throughout the state that are capable of providing monitoring data on air toxics. As with this study, these monitors show the state to be in compliance with the state air toxics regulations.

To see the complete air toxics study, as well as other air toxic-related information, go to www.deq.louisiana.gov.