

# Media statement – Sarnia

## Environmental Health Project results

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### Release information

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Headline

Sarnia Health Study underscores need for action to reduce air pollution

### Place line

SARNIA, ON

### Body

Aamjiwnaang First Nation is calling for immediate action after the release of a new environmental health report that confirms the urgent need for Ontario to take meaningful steps to reduce ongoing high levels of toxic air pollutants in their community. Aamjiwnaang says the results of the study confirm unacceptable levels of air pollution from nearby industries. Another health study without a commitment to remedy this ongoing environmental crisis falls short of Ontario's duty to protect the members of Aamjiwnaang First Nation.

On Nov. 28, Ontario's Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks presented highlights of its long-awaited [Sarnia Area Environmental Health Project](#) Air Exposure Review: Assessment Report. The report identifies significant health concerns associated with pollution levels in and around Sarnia and the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. This includes elevated levels of benzene, a pollutant which has been linked to leukemia, and sulphur dioxide which can lead to respiratory issues.

The Report, which is not publicly available yet, likely understates the risks posed by pollution. It does not disclose modelling inputs used to assess exposures, fails to examine the cumulative impacts of past and ongoing exposures to air pollutants and relies on outdated monitoring data to draw conclusions. Despite these weaknesses, the Report clearly identifies pollution levels are well above the standards the Ontario government sets to protect human health.

The Ontario Air Standard sets an acceptable level of benzene to be no higher than 0.45 µg/m<sup>3</sup> on an annual average basis. The benzene monitoring and modelling in the report documents concentrations well in excess of this standard while downplaying the risks to the community.

This is extremely troubling given that there continues to be ongoing high levels of benzene measured along the INEOS Styrolution property line and at the monitor near the Aamjiwnaang First Nation Band office. INEOS is already the subject of several government orders requiring it to reduce benzene emissions, but problems persist.

The air pollution levels identified in the Report, particularly for pollutants like benzene and sulphur dioxide, are also much greater than air pollution levels seen in comparable communities in the United States which have larger petroleum and petrochemical plants.

Exposure to elevated sulphur dioxide concentrations for a period as short as 10 minutes can cause severe respiratory distress particularly in sensitive individuals such as asthmatics. A research institute at Western University found that children born in the Sarnia area are more likely to develop asthma compared to children in other cities like London and Windsor.

**Chief Chris Plain said:**

“For decades pollution levels have been high in Aamjiwnaang due to the industry around us. It is the cumulative impact of air pollution from facilities that surround us that has made the Sarnia area one of the country’s worst pollution hotspots.”

“Our community has not only faced health impacts from the ongoing high levels of pollution and poor air quality. The constant pollution has also impacted our ability to engage in traditional practices and affected our cultural relationship with the land.”

“We’ve been calling for action to reduce pollution in our community for more than 100 years. We need governments to take the necessary steps to ensure the standards are protective of our health and to enforce the rules in place and reduce pollution in our community.”

“The lack of enforcement points to Environmental Racism in Canada.”

**Background information:**

- One of the goals of the Sarnia Area Environmental Health Project Air Exposure Review: Assessment Report was to recognize the disproportionate impact of settler-made pollution and poor air quality on Indigenous Peoples, who live and harvest in the areas most impacted, but also because of the spiritual and cultural relationship that the Aamjiwnaang First Nation and all Indigenous Peoples have, to the air, the waters, the plants and animals that grow within and around them.
- The report was commissioned [following a Global News investigation](#) that revealed a troubling pattern of potentially dangerous leaks from facilities in the area.
- There are dozens of industrial facilities within 25 kilometers of the City of Sarnia several of which are adjacent to Aamjiwnaang First Nation. This accounts for approximately 40 per cent of Canada’s petrochemical industry.
- AFN will be undertaking an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party technical review of the draft report and will provide specific feedback and recommendations at that time.

**For media inquiries, please contact:**

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