

Region may not be able to afford more detailed study

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The study had some significance for Mayor Ann Mulvale who chairs the EAC since it also outlines refinery odors as a reason for residents' dissatisfaction with the community and the reason some of them eventually move out. It also has implications for building new homes near odor-producing industries.

Along with fellow researchers, Sider conducted the study with help from the Region of Halton's health department. The region contributed 25% of the cost with the rest coming from the province's health ministry.

Sider said the study involved telephone interviews with a random selection of 360 households in three zones chosen by the health department. Zone 1 was an area in Oakville adjacent to the eastern and southern boundaries of the refinery; Zone 2 was farther east between Third and Fourth Lines and from Speers Road to the lake. Zone 3 — the control area — stretched from Appleby Line to Guelph Line along the lake, dipping up to Fairview street between Walker's and Guelph lines.

Basically, those interviewed were asked how often they noticed odors and how they were affected by them. The results showed there were no apparent differences between the high, medium and low impact zones. Those who perceived odors from the refinery were most likely to experience short-term health effects, no matter where they lived.

As well, those perceiving odors were more likely to report health effects than those who less frequently or never reported them.

The data showed that over half the people interviewed noticed odors attributed to the refinery at least

once a month. Of these, about half were bothered by them.

The research team categorized symptoms into those most likely to be the result of the irritant properties of odors — such as coughing, wheezing, breathing problems, nosebleeds and eye, nose and throat irritations — and general symptoms that would likely be caused by stress related to the odor annoyance. These included headaches, sleep problems,

loss of appetite and chest pains. Allowances were made in the study for children suffering from usual childhood complaints "who might grow out of them" and adults with allergies, he said.

"While rates of symptom complaints were generally higher in Zone 1 compared to Zone 3, very few of these results were statistically significant," noted Sider.

The researcher acknowledged the

study had limitations. Besides having to rely on self-reporting, researchers had no direct measurements of odor pollutants, he said. Moreover, the study was limited in the number of people interviewed.

Determining whether Petro-Canada's odors actually caused health problems to occur would require a far more detailed study involving more interviewees and more time and money than was at

his disposal this time, he said. Nosal was uncertain if this would be financially viable in the future.

Sider also advocated a follow-up study in the fall of next year, using the same people, if possible. In this way, the results of Petro-Canada's odor abatement Action Plan could be more accurately assessed.

The study was presented to the regional committee for its information only.

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