

O'Hare expansion foes demand closer look at air pollution

By Tona Kunz Daily Herald Staff Writer

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O'Hare expansion opponents want the state to take a closer look at airplane pollution in light of a recent study saying the Chicago region is an unhealthy place to breathe.

The Alliance of Residents Concerning O'Hare, an Arlington Heights-based not-for-profit group, is petitioning the state to look at the amount of particle pollution caused by airplanes. The microscopic soot causes asthma, cancer, strokes and heart attacks.

It comes from coal-burning power plants and diesel fuel from school buses, trucks and to a lesser extent airplanes. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is in the midst of a statewide inventory of where the pollution is coming from.

Jack Saporito, executive director of the alliance, wants the state to put a cap on the amount of emissions allowed in the area around and above O'Hare International, Midway, DuPage and Palwaukee airports.

Similar emission zones are often drawn over industrial areas to control overall pollution levels.

Saporito sent a letter to state leaders this week saying such a "bubble" should be in place before any airport expansions were undertaken.

A report released last week by the American Lung Association found Illinois to have the 12th-highest daily levels of the pollution in the nation. Cook, DuPage and Lake counties failed to meet the minimal U.S. Environmental Protection Agency safety levels for the most susceptible populations - children, senior citizens and the ill.

The report did not dwell on airline pollution because much of it comes from international flights, which the state can't regulate, said Brian Urbaszewski, lung association director of environmental health.

Jet fuel also produces less of the cancer-causing toxins than coal plants or trucks, he added.

But that doesn't mean airplanes and the truck traffic that typically goes with them, aren't hazardous to your health.

"It is good that someone is asking these questions because you can't say O'Hare is not responsible for part of the problem or Midway for that matter," Urbaszewski said. "I just don't know how much."

Urbaszewski said it would be difficult to isolate and control all of the emissions at O'Hare and suggested it would be better for Saporito to focus on controlling emissions from construction vehicles used in runway expansions. Construction equipment typically produces more toxic fumes than diesel trucks or buses. =====

Re: O'Hare expansion foes demand closer look at air pollution,  
Daily Herald (5/5/04).

We respectfully believe that the American Lung Association is in error regarding airports and its aircraft as minor polluters and will be presenting evidence to back up our statements. Maybe the ALA is not aware of recent evidence to the contrary re: its conjecture or maybe we are just talking "apples and oranges"?

Answering the ALA's thoughts, at first blush:

O'Hare is a mammoth polluter and is unique because it emits unusual toxic aviation related pollution from many sources, including its incinerator. O' Hare is located in a very densely populated area: more than 600,000 people live within three miles of the airport, millions within ten miles. This mammoth polluter is concentrated in only about four square miles and this concentration creates a horrible health menace to the residents of the local communities and the northwest side of Chicago.

1. O'Hare operations today, emit thousands of tons of noxious material into the air annually...enough to fill 120 football stadiums 100 feet deep...and this all moves through our neighborhoods and into our homes!

2. Data from both the state of Illinois and U.S. Environmental Protection agencies show that O'Hare's aircraft alone, emit more Volatile Organic Compounds than those from all (70-100) Illinois electric power plants combined, with Carbon Monoxide emissions as much as 60% of that total! Adding the associated ground, mobile and stationary emissions would double that. (We believe that some of the other criteria pollutants are also off-the-charts; however, the industry does not release numbers on some of those emissions for aircraft.)

O'Hare and its aircraft is first a major local point or area emission source, since a large majority of aircraft emissions are emitted at or relatively near the airport during the landing and take-off cycles. O'Hare is basically a functioning major city with mega aircraft operations with all the supporting operations that a city would need including an onsite incinerator, power plants, major fueling operations and about 175,000 cars, trucks, taxis, etc. that go into the four square mile O'Hare confines each day. A recent O'Hare/Peotone study shows that 8.3 million people's health is affected by O'Hare operations, 5.5 million significantly so.

Considering only one of the dozens of airport-poisoning diseases, it has been estimated that cancer incidences caused by O'Hare airport and its aircraft cost the public approximately \$8 billion annually. The victims, not the Chicago airport, endure this considerable cost.

Then there is the NESCAUM study (8 states EPA agencies, The Clean Air Policy and overseen by the USEPA) showing that in fact aircraft are in fact horrible polluters emitting much more pollutants than most major "stationary" sources.

These numbers are prior to NESCAUM, which also shows that the air transport industry is grossly reporting its emissions, on a U.S. basis, from USEPA

(1999) database, and assuming that O'Hare fixed operations were equal to "aircraft only" in all emission categories (i.e. double the amounts below for the total), O'Hare's rank versus U.S. major polluters would be:

\* #49 for CO, with Bethlehem Steel (IL) #1 @ 165,519 t/y vs. O'Hare @ 13,592 t/yr

\* Approx. #150 for NOx, with TVA (Ky) #1 @ 104,357 t/y vs. O'Hare @ 11,008 t/y

\* #25 for VOC's, with Tennessee Eastman (TN) #1 @ 15,971 t/y vs. O'Hare @ 3,700 t/y \*SO2 is unknown for O'Hare, so no comparison.

Using 1995 data and Mobile 5a for cars: One 747 takeoff is equal to the following number of cars driven three miles for each pollutant; (3 miles is equal to a two minute takeoff):

CO = 11.58 cars, HC = 136, NOx = 24,083, SOx = 550,000 cars! JUST ONE AIRCRAFT'S TAKEOFF!

Alternately, one two minute 747 take-off is equal to operating 2.4 million lawnmowers for 20 minutes (Nitrogen oxides, Carbon monoxide, Hydrocarbons). That is four states' worth of lawnmowers! JUST ONE AIRCRAFT'S TAKEOFF!

Certainly, O'Hare airport, and its operations, is a major polluter...

Also, then there is the distribution issue: cars and trucks and the diseases they cause are generally concentrated within 750 feet of the roadway and smokestacks are stationary sources; yet, aircraft, flying over our heads, spread out their pollution contamination, concentrated over 20 miles or more from an airport.

Another thought is that the ALA is looking regionally, all sources within a 9-10 county area, while our first concern is locally, and the horrible polluters airports and aircraft operations are to their neighbors.

...And O'Hare is just one airport.

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