

ASTHMA – BENICIA DESERVES BETTER

In her letter of March 6, Constance Beutel wrote, “Benicia deserves better health and safety protection from potentially dangerous industrial mishaps and toxic emissions.”

She went on to describe the actual experience of many in our community who suffer from asthma, relating their suffering to the huge amount – 3 million metric tons – of toxic emissions released annually in California (source: California Air Resources Board).

In a March 2018 report prepared by the Solano County Department of Health (SCDH), I learned that Benicia has a higher rate of emergency room visits for asthma than Californians as a whole. The numbers are startling: in Benicia, 202.13 per 10,000 individuals went to the emergency room for asthma in 2011-13. The rate for California was 148.86 per 10,000. (SCDH source: California’s Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development.)

The same report showed statistics on hospital admissions due to asthma: Benicia 81.08 per 10,000 compared to California at 70.55.

Rates for emergency room visits for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and mortality from chronic lower respiratory disease (CLRD) were similarly higher in Benicia than statewide. Air pollution and asthma are contributing factors to these lung diseases.

I am working with a volunteer group of Benicians who believe that a refinery town like Benicia needs a seat at the table when it comes to air pollution. We and our government officials should have a voice on circumstances that affect the health and safety of our workers in the industrial park and of all of us wherever we are, in our homes and schools and workplaces. Benicia should have real-time air monitoring throughout our community, and early warnings and transparent investigation and follow-ups when there is an incident.

Our Working Group has studied carefully the provisions of the local Industrial Safety Ordinance currently protecting workers and residents of all the other refinery towns in the Bay Area – and we are asking our Benicia City Council and staff to carefully consider adopting such an ordinance here.

For more information about a community Industrial Safety Ordinance, go to tinyurl.com/BeniciaISO.

Roger Straw
Benicia ISO Working Group