



## Friends of Toppenish Creek

### **Informational Message regarding Asthma in the Yakima Valley**

This message from the Friends of Toppenish Creek concerns respiratory health issues in the Yakima Valley. We believe that the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency understates problems and mis-informs the public regarding levels of ammonia in the air.

On January 7, 2016 a Lower Yakima Valley newspaper, the Review Independent, published a story entitled *Study Finds Low Ammonia Emissions at Area Dairies*. The same piece was published in the Yakima Business Times. The second paragraph of that article states:

*The Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency continues to work on improving air quality with local residents and businesses, including farms. Although research reveals small amounts of ammonia emissions from farms, experts say these emissions are insignificant and do not pose an overall threat to human health.*

There is no way to find the “two-year ammonia emissions monitoring study” and verify the data. No author is listed. After reading the article Larry Fendell, a concerned citizen and longtime resident in the valley, contacted Randy Luvaas, the managing editor for Yakima Valley Publishing. Mr. Fendell asked who did the reporting and investigating. Mr. Luvaas replied that the article was submitted by the Washington Dairy Commission and was vetted and approved by Washington State University and the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency.

The Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency is the authority on air pollution in the valley. This is the only agency with power to address air problems. YRCAA is aware of the Yakima Air Winter Nitrate Study that was recently performed by the Washington State Department of Ecology. YRCAA is aware of the link between ammonia and fine particulate matter and that the county is at risk for non-compliance for this pollutant. YRCAA is aware of the elevated and increasing levels of ammonia in Yakima County that have been documented by the Environmental Protection Agency. YRCAA is aware of the asthma research that has been performed by both John Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and the University of Washington School of Public Health.

On January 13, 2016 citizens attended the monthly board meeting for the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency. Jean Mendoza explained to the board that most people in the valley get air quality information through the media; that the most reliable source of information should be the agency whose job is protection of the public. When people read this article they will likely

believe that there is no danger to their health from ammonia emissions. YRCAA had an opportunity to educate the public about the problem. Instead it appears that YRCAA endorsed a statement absolving the dairy industry of any contribution to the respiratory problems that both adults and children experience in the valley. Mrs. Mendoza asked the board to direct YRCAA staff to address the issue with Yakima Valley Publishing and arrange for a public clarification. Yakima County Commissioner Rand Elliott, acting board chair, state that he would review and consider the request.

Later during the meeting Hasan Tahat, Environmental Engineer for the agency, defended YRCAA's actions. He had only read the abstract from the U of W research but he quoted the abstract as though one sentence describing one result outweighed all the rest of the study. The sentence he quoted said, "We observed no associations between self-reported asthma symptoms or medication usage and estimated ammonia exposure." A key finding that Mr. Tahat neglected was a decrease in pulmonary function for asthmatic children as ammonia levels increased.

This is not the first time that YRCAA has accepted one piece of information that is favorable to the dairy industry and ignored large volumes of data that point to public health problems. In 2013 citizens asked for a ban on spreading and spraying manure during inversions and presented over 100 documents to the agency that describe health issues related to CAFO air pollution. The Washington Dairy Commission presented a literature review that ignored most of these studies and supposedly proved no risk to public health. YRCAA sided with the dairy commission.

Citizens have complained for twenty years that this agency does not protect the people from air pollution that comes from industrial dairies. Citizens have documented a pattern of behavior in which YRCAA defends polluting industries. The owner of a fertilizer plant that is regulated by YRCAA and was the subject of investigation for air pollution has served on the YRCAA Board of Directors in the past. A recent addition to the board operates a business that receives significant income from the dairy industry. Citizens from the impacted Lower Yakima Valley have applied to serve on the board and have been rejected.

We are waiting to learn how the Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency will inform the public about the true risks from ammonia air pollution. And we are sending this information to community leaders who may wish to advocate for the people who live in the Yakima Valley.

Thank you for reading. More data is available on request.

*The Friends of Toppenish Creek*

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