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## **Testimony of Director Lynne Saxton on Air Toxics in Portland before the House Energy and Environment Committee**

Chair Vega Pederson and members of the committee, thank you the invitation to testify this morning. I am Lynne Saxton, Director, of the Oregon Health Authority. I appreciate this opportunity to outline the Oregon Health Authority (OHA)'s actions and answer your questions.

One of OHA's most important roles is to protect public health and keep Oregonians informed about health risks in their communities. Once we learned on January 21, 2016 that the US Forest Service and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) had detected elevated levels of cadmium and arsenic in Portland, OHA took specific and immediate action. As Gov. Brown described in her February 15 letter, our actions have focused on three priorities:

- Assess health risks and inform the public;
- Help residents in the affected neighborhoods obtain testing and provide evidence-based health information so they can protect themselves and their families; and
- Reduce the risks of toxic exposures in Portland and other Oregon communities.

Let me provide you some additional details on the actions we're taking on each of these fronts.

### **Assess health risks and inform the public**

After we received information about the cadmium, arsenic (and later chromium) findings, our medical experts mobilized to evaluate the potential threats these metal emissions pose to the public. We shared this information with our agency partners and with the Portland community.

- **Incident command:** We set up an incident command structure and joint information center with DEQ and Multnomah County to manage the response to these health risks. This structure enables state and local agencies to work together and keep the public up to date on new developments.

- **Hotline:** We partnered with 211 to answer questions about air toxics from Portland residents, parents and health care providers.
- **Community meetings and online updates:** Our health experts, Dr. David Farrer, OHA Public Health Toxicologist, Dr. Paul Cieslak, OHA Medical Director for Communicable Diseases and Immunization, Dr. Bill Lambert, OHSU Toxicologist and Dr. Bruce Gutelius, OHA Deputy State Epidemiologist, spoke at community meetings in North and Southeast Portland. We developed fact sheets and other information for the public and we are providing regular updates and other information on our website ([www.state.gov/oha](http://www.state.gov/oha)).

### **Help residents in the affected neighborhoods**

- **Analyze cancer risks:** Many people who live near the two glass manufacturing facilities linked to these emissions are concerned about their risk of developing cancer and other serious diseases. To answer these questions, OHA launched a review of data from the state cancer registry for the areas of Southeast Portland that have been exposed. At this time, our medical researchers have found no evidence of an increase in cancers associated with cadmium and arsenic exposure. We are conducting a similar study for North Portland.
- **Pay for cadmium tests:** We are developing plans to cover the costs of cadmium testing for current residents of the highest risk neighborhoods. So far, physician calls to the Oregon Poison Center regarding test results have not indicated an elevated risk. However, we want to ensure no one who wants to test themselves or their loved ones will be prevented from being tested because they cannot pay the cost.
- **Use rule-making authority to require cadmium reporting:** Last week, we implemented a rule requiring that all positive urine tests for cadmium in Oregon be reported to OHA. The purpose of this rule is to help systematically gather and analyze exposure data. Local public health officials will follow up with patients based on the reports. These data will help us analyze the extent of the potential exposure and determine whether it is appropriate to expand the scope of testing.
- **Provide evidence-based health guidance:** We are providing information to physicians and other care providers to ensure residents receive appropriate and effective testing and treatment.

### **Reduce the risks of toxic exposures in Portland and other Oregon communities**

OHA is working with DEQ to assess health risks of air and soil samples currently being gathered and analyzed. We will share results with the public in the coming week, as we complete the analysis. In the meantime, we will notify the public if we identify any acute health risks based on preliminary data from the samples DEQ has been collecting.

Going forward, we want to do everything we can to minimize the risks from heavy metals in the air in Southeast and North Portland, and in every Oregon community. I grew up in North Portland and I live in Southeast Portland. I understand and share the community's concern.

This exposure has highlighted fundamental gaps in our federal and state laws, rules and permitting processes. OHA looks forward to working with state legislators, our congressional delegation, DEQ, local health departments and community members to identify appropriate solutions as soon as possible, while continuing to monitor health risks and inform the public.

Thank you.