

# THE DAILY GAZETTE

THE LOCALLY OWNED VOICE OF THE CAPITAL REGION

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## Poor more likely to breathe unhealthy air NY's unhealthiest air blows out of Rochester Kodak site

BY BEN DOBBIN  
The Associated Press

ROCHESTER — Chemical odors drifting out of Kodak Park, the mammoth film-manufacturing hub that George Eastman opened here over a century ago, periodically drove Carol Messina-Provost off her front porch.

"We would close up our windows and stay inside," she said. "When I get a good whiff of Kodak, I get awful, awful headaches. It's a very vile smell. Sometimes, I even get a funky taste in my mouth."

After 15 years living in the once solidly middle-class 10th Ward, an increasingly haggard enclave next to the biggest industrial plant in the Northeast, Messina-Provost reluctantly pulled up stakes last year and moved to the suburbs.

The nine neighborhood-sized census tracts in New York where industrial air pollution poses the most serious threat to human health either lie right beside or within a mile or two of Eastman Kodak Co.'s 1,300-acre park, an Associated Press analysis of federal pollution, health and census data found.



KEVIN BIVOLI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Carol Messina-Provost of Rochester last year moved from her middle-class 10th Ward neighborhood after 15 years of living with chemical odors coming out of Kodak Park, the biggest industrial plant in the Northeast, pictured at rear on Oct. 5.

### Hot spots

In New York state, 107 census tracts are in the top 5 percent of the nation's most unhealthy neighborhoods, based on air pollution health risk scores. The number of neighborhoods by county:

- ◆ Monroe: 63
- ◆ Erie: 14
- ◆ Niagara: 8
- ◆ Onondaga: 5
- ◆ Chautauqua: 4
- ◆ Seneca: 3
- ◆ Herkimer: 2
- ◆ Nassau: 2
- ◆ Rensselaer: 2
- ◆ Saratoga: 2
- ◆ Ulster: 1
- ◆ Warren: 1

Race, low income, pollution  
often go hand-in-hand

BY DAVID PACE  
The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Kevin Brown's most feared opponent on the sandlot or basketball court while he was growing up wasn't another kid. It was the polluter air he breathed.

"I would look outside and I would see him just leaning on a tree or leaning over a pole, gasping, gasping, trying to get some breath so he could go back to playing," recalls his mother, Lana Brown.

Kevin suffered from asthma. His mother is convinced the factory air that covered their neighborhood triggered the attacks that sent them rushing to the emergency room week after week, his panic filling the car.

"I can't breathe! I have no air. I'm going to die!"

The air in the neighborhood where Kevin played football the least healthy in the country, according to a little-known government research project that assigns risk scores for industrial air pollution in every square kilometer of the United States.

An Associated Press analysis of that data shows black Americans like the Browns are 70 percent

## NEW YORK

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Massimo Provost, 44, was stunned not only that her old neighborhood topped the state list, ranking 3rd nationally in the AP analysis, but that no fewer than 63 of 107 tracts in New York with the highest health-risk measures from industrial pollutants are in Rochester and surrounding Monroe County.

"Doesn't that make you feel good? Oh my God!" she exclaimed while driving along Kodak Park's miles-long perimeter. There's two sides to every coin. Kodak has done a lot of good things in far as jobs and being supportive of the community,

and they also have polluted our neighborhood. Is it worth it?"

With help from government scientists, AP mapped the risk scores to every neighborhood counted by the Census Bureau in 2000. The scores were then used to compare risks between neighborhoods and to study the racial and economic traits of those who breathe America's least healthy air.

The analysis found 44 other census tracts in New York in the top 5 percent of the unhealthiest neighborhoods. Fourteen are in Erie County, eight in Niagara, five in Onondaga, four in Chautauque, three in Seneca, two each in Herkimer, Nassau, Rensselaer and Saratoga, and one each in Ulster and Warren.

### SARATOGA COUNTY

The two census tracts in Saratoga County are near the General Electric Silicones plant in Waterford. GE Silicones is a leader in the development, manufacture and sale of silicone products.

The tract that covers the village of Waterford itself ranked 1,376 among the nation's 65,443 tracts. The lower the rank, the greater the health risk.

According to the AP data, residents in the Waterford tract ran a health risk 31.6 times greater than the national median.

The other Saratoga tract is just north of Waterford between Upper and Lower New Town roads in Halfmoon. The tract ranked 2,035 and the health risk was 25.4 times the national median.

The two Rensselaer County tracts are directly across the Hudson River from the Saratoga tracts. A tract in north Troy ranked 2,407 with a health risk 21.6 times the median and a Schuylkill tract ranked 2,833 with a risk 19.4 times the median.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation regulates emissions from industrial plants in New York State.

DEC officials said Tuesday that they had no information on EPA or census data.

State and Saratoga County Health Departments officials said Tuesday they had no information about possible health effects for residents breathing the air near the plant in Waterford.

In 2003, the DEC cited the GE Silicones site for the release of hydrogen chloride into the air the previous year.

At the time of the citation, DEC spokesman Michael Fraser said the chemical compound can cause eye irritation and coughing, but he could not say if there were any long-term problems associated with exposure. GE Silicones spokeswoman Maria Moreno said on Tuesday that she had no information on the federal report and could not comment.

Matthew Shapiro of the Citizen's Environmental Coalition in Albany said his group includes about 100 members from the immediate Waterford area who have expressed concern about the emissions from the GE Silicones plant.

"That plant is the third largest producer of volatile organic compounds in New York," said Shapiro. "It's an equal opportunity polluter housing a hazardous waste incinerator that opens into upper, middle and lower class neighborhoods."

The coalition is a non-profit organization made up of different groups focused on the environment, environmental justice and public health, said Shapiro.

### INDUSTRY HAZARDS

The AP used EPA risk scores from 2000, to match census data. Risks may have changed since then as factories opened or closed or their emissions changed. The risk scores aren't meant to calculate citizens' precise odds of getting sick but rather to help compare communities and identify those in need of further attention.

The scores also don't include risks from other types of air pollution, such as automobile exhaust.

Since the 1980s, growing unease about the potential hazards of a heavily industrial section anchored by Kodak Park have prompted a series of health studies in adjoining communities. Yet none of them revealed "a signifi-

cantly higher rate" of illness, whether it be brain cancer, low birth-weight babies or common health symptoms such as asthma, coughs and itchy eyes, said Dr. Andrew Doniger, the county's health director.

"Rochester does have some very specific chemicals in the atmosphere related to the manufacturing of film but those are very closely regulated," Doniger said. "For pretty much the last decade or so, the levels have been below the ambient air guidelines set by the state and federal governments."

"Obviously it would be nice if we could be living farther away from businesses that discharge chemicals because it's difficult and expensive to control pollutants and do all the monitoring necessary to protect the public but we haven't separated where we live and where people work in industry in Rochester very well."

For generations of families in New York's third biggest city, Kodak was a powerful patron extolled for taking care of its own and worries about pollution long took a back seat. But while the pioneer of mass-market picture-taking has acknowledged past mistakes, it vigorously defends its recent environmental record.

Since 1987, when federal regulators started rating industries by pollution, air emissions at Kodak Park have plummeted 80 percent. More than half of its 2.9 million pounds in discharges last year came not from photo-industry chemicals but from Kodak's own coal-burning power plants, said spokesman Chris Veranda.

Releases of methylene chloride, a probable carcinogen used to make acetate film base, have dropped from 8.7 million pounds in 1987 to around 600,000 pounds, Kodak said. But fence-line air concentrations of the solvent registered between 4.1 and 0.7 parts per billion, higher than a stringent state guideline of 0.6 parts per billion set in 2000.

"One part per billion is basically nothing, the equivalent of one step on the journey to the moon," Veranda said, adding that emissions from motor vehicles "really do dwarf industrial pollutants."

### POLLUTION RISKS

Research over the past two decades has shown that even short-term exposure to levels of air pollution common in many cities and industrial parks worsens existing lung and heart disease, increases the need for medical attention and can cause death.

Plants whose emission reports were used by Environmental Protection Agency scientists to develop the health risk measures must meet air pollution standards set by EPA under the Clean Air Act.