

## Health researchers to explain plans for Tonawanda Coke study



Tonawanda Coke, Tuesday, Aug. 19, 2014. (Derek Gee/Buffalo News)

- By [Nancy A. Fischer](#), Published Tue, Feb 14, 2017

The public is invited to hear about plans to conduct soil contamination studies at Tonawanda Coke's manufacturing operation in the Town of Tonawanda and to become involved in an \$11 million, 10-year study of the company's impact on the public health of Tonawanda and Grand Island residents.

A public information meeting will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday in Tonawanda City Hall, 200 Niagara St.

The studies, to be done by University at Buffalo public health researchers, were ordered last year after a federal appeals court [upheld the company's criminal conviction](#) and dismissed suggestions that the lower court overstepped its bounds in ordering it to pay for the public health study.

In addition to testing the soil over the next two years, researchers will track the health of 38,000 Tonawanda and Grand Island residents, as well as current and former Tonawanda Coke employees.

"We are looking for volunteers to have their yards tested or to become citizen scientists – going out in teams and collecting soil samples," said Jackie James Creedon, who heads the grassroots Citizen Science Community Resources, a group that advocated for the public health studies.

Creedon founded the group in 2003 after she was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, a painful neuromuscular disorder, the same year she met Adele Henderson, another ill-affected community member. They began doing their own research in 2005 and fought for the soil and health study.

She said the monitoring effort has come a long way from a decade ago, when she would go out with a few neighbors, armed with a retrofitted bucket and bag to collect air samples around Tonawanda Coke's plant on River Road.

"Every day I come into work I feel like I am living a miracle," said Creedon. "I had health issues and so many people around here had health issues. We started with the question, 'Why are so many people sick?' Now we have this [\\$11 million health study](#)."

The appeals court also upheld a \$12.5 million fine against Tonawanda Coke, which was found guilty on 14 criminal charges related to toxic emissions and the illegal handling of hazardous waste at its River Road plant.

The verdict followed testimony by more than 30 witnesses, many of them former and current Tonawanda Coke employees, who testified about toxic emissions and the improper handling of hazardous waste. The testimony included accounts of a little-known-pressure-release valve that spewed coke oven gas with benzene into the air.

Kathryn Little, a recent graduate of the University at Buffalo with a master's degree in environmental engineering, will be at Thursday's meeting as a community organizer for Citizen Science Community Resources to discuss the soil study and explain to residents how they can get involved.

The Citizen Science Community Resources has opened up an office and is looking for volunteers with a passion for the environment as "citizen scientists."

Creedon said the group's own story proves people can do something.

"So many people feel powerless. But the story so far says look what we can accomplish as a community. It's amazing. Let's just keep it going," said Creedon.