

# When the Sirens are Quiet, Is Everything Under Control?



Blog for Air Justice



Photo by Guillaume Cou   on Unsplash.

These ominous signs are plastered around Rubbertown notifying residents to seek shelter in the event of an emergency. Accompanying these signs are emergency sirens, a common fixture in US cities intended to warn residents of an imminent threat. These threats are typically weather-related; however in West Louisville, a quieter, more invasive danger lingers in the air.

Chemicals pouring out of local manufacturing facilities have polluted the air since Rubbertown's inception. The consequences of air pollution can sneak up on residents, who notice after decades of residency that **they cannot breathe quite as well as they could in the past**. But sometimes, disasters turn these acute threats into disruptions the local government can no longer ignore.



**“Rubbertown’s regular output is life-threatening, even without unforeseen leaks and spills.”**


Photo by Seiya Maeda on Unsplash.

Explosions and leaks are loud threats to the industry and to the community, so sirens were implemented to warn residents to avoid the fallout. A factory explosion can create a much more urgent and deadly situation for those in the immediate area, but the reality is that Rubbertown's regular output is life-threatening even without these unforeseen incidents. So the question lingers, **are the sirens doing enough?**

It's disheartening for residents when those sirens are shut off, when their city tells them “the problem is solved, you may proceed with your day.” Those who live close to chemical and industrial facilities know that even when "running like clockwork," Rubbertown is an active threat to the community's health & well-being.



**“The sirens represent a noisy, ultimately performative means of addressing the issue only when it is simply too big to ignore.”**



The sirens represent a noisy, ultimately performative means of addressing the issue only when it is simply too big to ignore. Any other time, everything is business as usual. Will the city use emergency action resources to acknowledge the quieter dangers inherent in what Rubbertown produces in the air around West Louisville? If so, **sirens would be going off at all hours of the day.**

Sirens blaring all day sounds like a nightmare, but then again, so does living in a home you love where you are nevertheless exposed to poor air quality and thus poor health outcomes. Rubbertown is going to need a lot more than sirens to bring healing to the communities that surround it.