

Are Environmental Odors Toxic?

Just because it smells does not mean it is toxic.

Odors and General Well-Being

Odors may affect communities. Some chemicals give off strong odors, making people feel sad and upset, reducing the quality of life, and sense of well-being. In general, most odors in the air are not at levels that cause disease, and the symptoms from odors go away when the odor is not there.

When exposed to environmental odors, some people may experience health effects:

- **Symptoms:** headaches, dizziness, memory loss and nausea.
- **Visible signs:** watery eyes, stuffy nose, irritated throat, and coughing and wheezing in people with allergies, asthma and other chronic lung diseases.
- **Psychological effects:** depression and sadness. The odors in the immediate surrounding area might make people in the community feel helpless.
- **Sleep problems:** people may not sleep well due to irritation such as scratchy throat and coughing.

Sensitive Populations

Not everyone reacts to environmental odors the same way. In general, children, the elderly, and women may be more sensitive to odors. People suffering from depression and anxiety disorders as well as people with allergies, asthma and other chronic lung conditions may not feel well when odors are in the air they breathe.

How to Prevent Exposure to Odors?

- Exercise indoors during days with increased environmental odors.
- Stay indoors when your allergies, asthma and/or chronic lung problems are acting up.
- If possible, get away from the odors for a few hours by leaving the area.

You may come in contact with many odors. The chart below lists some of the sources that may be found in a community surrounded by different types of industries.

Some Sources of Odors

Semiconductor manufacturing companies →

Food processing plants; Livestock

feeding facilities; Paper mills; and Landfills } →

Wood treatment facilities →

Petroleum refineries →

Some Odorous Chemicals

Ammonia; Acetone; and Isopropyl alcohol

Hydrogen sulfide

Pentachlorophenol and Creosote

Hydrogen sulfide; Sulfur oxides;

Benzene; Toluene; and Xylene

