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Atlanta EPD branch still looking into major industries as source of foul smell

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The search for an odor in Brunswick continues not just among local authorities, but at the state Environmental Protection Division's Air Quality Branch as well.

Steve Allison, Chemicals and Minerals Compliance Unit manager at the Air Quality Branch in Atlanta, said a town hall meeting in January with Brunswick residents was informative and helpful but noted the investigation so far has been unfruitful.

"I wish I could say yes (we have made progress), but not really," Allison said.

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The Brunswick office handles most EPD business, Allison explained, but the Air Quality Branch is responsible for the largest industries in the state, including Georgia Pacific, Pnova and Symrise. He and an EPD engineer inspected Pnova's resin products plant last week, but they still have to crunch the data.

“Kind of like Brunswick Cellulose (Georgia Pacific’s pulp mill), it’s an ongoing investigation. There’s not a lot I can say with that yet,” Allison said. “I’ll say we didn’t see anything major. Realistically there haven’t been any real major insights yet.”

No entity is off the hook yet. An inspection of the pulp mill was conducted earlier this year, and data gleaned is similarly still under scrutiny.

Spokespersons for Georgia Pacific and Pinova say they have seen no change in operations that could explain the smell, which first appeared on the EPD’s radar via dozens of reports in late 2020.



Allison said he used the Pinova inspection trip as an opportunity to look into the Golden Ray as well.

“It had a little bit of a low tide aroma, but that was it, and I was standing basically right next to it,” Allison said.

Air quality monitoring by the Golden Ray Incident Command has picked up no gases that can be linked to the odors reported in Brunswick. He found it particularly interesting that the monitors picked up no hydrogen sulfide, which is one of the suspected causes of the foul air.

“They’re not getting something that could have potentially have smelled badly off the ship,” Allison said. “I won’t say that rules them out, but that’s one of the few pieces of data we have that says it’s not them.”

He noted that monitoring around the Golden Ray is not the same as the ambient air quality monitoring that citizens and environmental groups have called for, and wouldn’t detect everything that could be producing an offensive stench.

The next step in the Atlanta branch's investigation is to simply crunch data and parse reports from residents. He's gone over data from Symrise's operations but has yet to schedule an inspection of the fragrances, flavors, cosmetic active ingredients and raw materials plant.

For the time being, residents who notice a foul odor they can't place should email EPD Environmental Compliance Specialist Brett Berry at brett.berry@dnr.ga.gov or call 470-464-4675 with the location, time, wind direction, wind speed and temperature at the time the odor was noticed and a description of it.



Taylor Cooper