

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Nhatt Nichols bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, July 17, 2024.

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Environmental health scientists from a federal agency visited Port Townsend to discuss recently published results from a study of the health risks related to the Port Townsend Paper Company. The study's first and most alarming conclusion stated that breathing sulfur compounds in the air near the mill can potentially cause adverse acute respiratory effects. Aaron Young, an environmental health scientist for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) said, "By measuring the range of sulfur compounds, we have evidence that, yes, multiple of these contaminants can occur at a high level, and together they can have acute health effects." While it was emphasized that the level at which acute respiratory effects have been proven to occur was only reached on a few occasions during the study. Because sulfur levels spiked at specific times and were not present at high enough levels continuously, chronic health effects from sulfur compounds were not found in the study. The study also noted that "repeated exposure to irritating, malodorous chemicals [...] may induce chronic respiratory illnesses including asthma, especially in children and elderly adults, although the relevant pollutant mixtures and exposures are not well understood."

This study differed from previous air quality testing with the use of a new technology which allowed for 14 different sulfur compounds to be measured in combination instead of only measuring isolated compounds like hydrogen sulfide and sulfur dioxide. While groundbreaking in scope, the study still lags behind as the testing was done all the way back in 2018, four years before international investment group Atlas Holdings, LLC bought the mill. Since taking over operations in 2022, upgrades to the facility by the new owners have cut sulfur usage at the mill by around 20% according to Micheal Clea, the Port Townsend Paper Company's environmental manager.

The Port Townsend Paper Company remains the largest private employer in Jefferson County, and is widely regarded as the savior of the local economy for almost 100 years. It was recommended in the local study that the Washington State Department of Ecology – which regulates the Port Townsend Paper Company – consider implementing a community-based outdoor air monitoring program. Young said, "We can't keep this up for longer than 10 weeks at a time" The 2018 study which cost around half a million dollars to complete.

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One stakeholder who may be able to organize the continued monitoring is the Thriving Earth Exchange which supports citizen science by helping communities find resources. Using local volunteers, the organization has helped hundreds of communities study pollution, including projects specifically related to industrial air pollution. Community involvement has been key from the very beginning. In order to persuade the federal agency to come to Port Townsend for this study, it took numerous complaints from local people about the smell from the mill. In total, over 2,000 complaints were compiled after a database began collecting them in 2007. Community members should report odors from the Port Townsend Paper Mill to Washington Department of Ecology's Environmental Engineer, Emily Toffol ([emily.toffol@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:emily.toffol@ecy.wa.gov)). When reporting odors, please provide the following information: date, time, location, odor description, and any health impacts experienced.

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Port Townsend's Uptown Theatre, once a local entertainment touchstone that has fallen upon hard times, is for sale. The listed price is \$875,000, below the initial realtor's recommendation of \$1.1 million, to bring it into an acceptable range for a buyer who wants to keep the theater going. The building was constructed in 1897 and became a theater 50 years later. Since then it has operated continuously, showing first run movies to eager

audiences. Ten years ago the owners renovated the inside, adding comfortable new seats and a modern digital projection system. The viewing experience was first rate, but the building's dilapidated appearance contradicted the theater's luxurious interior. While the outside is protected, there are no rules about the inside. A new owner could reopen as a bowling alley or an art gallery, but still would face significant restoration challenges. Retrofitting the theater to become ADA compatible is potentially the most expensive line item.

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KPTZ broadcasts local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5 and at noon on Saturday, coming on Wednesday to bring you stories from the Jefferson County *Beacon*. For this week's stories and more, go to <https://www.jeffcobeacon.com/>. This is Nhatt Nichols and thanks for listening.