

Analyzation of Efforts Made to Reduce Salt Lake's Air Pollution

Salt Lake City has been an outdoor enthusiast's mecca for many decades. The proximity of the mountains allows for ease of access to world class activities within minutes. It has slowly become one of the tech capitals of the nation (if not the world), boasting headquarters to companies such as Adobe and EA Games. But Salt Lake City has another title to add to its repertoire. According to the American Lung Association, in January 2017 Salt Lake was among the top 10 worst cities for air pollution. Unfortunately, this is just another year Salt Lake has held this title. The issue of air pollution has shifted from being an environmentalist one, to a "PTA mom issue," meaning the public 'seemingly' cares. In actuality, despite the legislative efforts and the increase in community group action, the majority of individuals lack in taking *personal* action, thus resulting in continual bad air quality leading to significant health risks.

The air pollution in Salt Lake is due to two main pollutants: Ozone and Particulate Matter Pollution. Particulate Matter Pollution is considerably dangerous and has significant proven effects on humans. This form of pollution comes from burning fossil fuels (such as car emissions.) These small "particles" get into human airways and deep into the bloodstream. Once here, the blood vessels become inflamed and can lead to an increased risk for heart attack. Severe air pollution has also been proven to accelerate the aging of the lungs, leading to a shortened life span. In addition, it has also been strongly linked to significant respiratory diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and even cancer.

Considering all of the health risks associated with the pollution issue in Salt Lake, there have been significant legislative efforts to decrease these harmful effects and pave way for a cleaner tomorrow. One big step was the creation of the Utah Conservation Act. This act empowers the Utah Air Quality Board to have significant power on the public (more details discussed later.) In addition to this, this year (2018) alone, there have already been 11 clean air bills proposed, with more to come. This is in comparison to 2017, where 15 bills were proposed in total. The Utah legislature has also passed several bills this year in an effort to clean up our air pollution. For example, HB 331-Air Pollution Mitigation Education Program educates new drivers about how they are able to reduce their impact on the air by doing things such as eliminating cold starts and reducing their idling. SB 136- Transportation Governance Amendments was also passed. This bill increases funding for building electric vehicle infrastructure (charging stations) to help promote the usage of electric vehicles.

In addition to legislative action, there has also been significant action taken by community based groups to help clean Salt Lake's air. As mentioned earlier, the Utah Conservation Act empowers the Utah Air Quality Board to enact rules and allow for these rules to have the same effect as legislative action. There are hundreds of rules created by the Utah Air

Quality Board in order to create better air quality. For example, R307-415:Operating Permit Requirements requires business to obtain a permit in order to operate. This checks the business' emissions to ensure they are up to standard. R307-410: Emissions Impact Analysis is a set of standards new emissions sources must meet in order to be used.

In addition to the Utah Air Quality Board, there are two other large community groups in Salt Lake with a sole focus on improving the air quality, BREATHE Utah and UCAIR. One of BREATHE Utah's primary focuses is on home and small business emissions. According to the Department of Environmental Quality "our homes and businesses account for 39% of our air pollution." BREATHE Utah is focused on retrofitting living complexes and businesses to reduce their emissions by doing things such as improving insulation and installing solar panels. UCAIR is a statewide clean air partnership created to help empower individuals, small businesses and communities to make little changes that greatly improve Salt Lake's air quality. Two of their main points of focus are education for the public and providing grants. Their education curriculum focuses on *why* Salt Lake needs to improve its air quality as well as every day steps individuals can make to reduce their personal impact. The grant program they created monetarily rewards organizations who have taken creative steps to reduce their emissions, providing a means for incentive to make environmental changes.

Despite the significant efforts made through legislative action and community based group action, the real solution to Salt Lake's pollution problem lies within the public. But the real issue? There is strong awareness of the poor air quality and a strong disapproval rating for Salt Lake's air among the public, but there is very little personal action taken. According to a Dan Jones & Associates survey, in an effort to reduce their personal emissions, 30% of state residents worked from home at least once in 2016, 38% carpooled and only 27% took public transportation. Barely a third of those surveyed were willing to make small emissions changes. In addition, the American Lung Association reported Provo, Orem and the Salt Lake metro as the 18th most polluted city in America in 2018. In 2017, it was 20th. Much of this is attributed to car pollution, meaning individuals are still not taking the necessary steps to decrease their impact. Now whether this is due to an actual increase in emissions or other cities are improving their air quality, it is still a negative sign.

The efforts made by Salt Lake's legislature as well as community group efforts to improve the air quality has been significant. But despite these efforts, the real source of improvement lies within the public. And unfortunately, the individual action taken has been miniscule to what it needs to be. With the increase in Salt Lake's population, without individuals making the changes, the air quality will continue to worsen and the proven health hazards from air pollution will continue to affect all Salt Lake residents.

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