



# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Sylvester Turner**

Mayor

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May 14, 2020

Toby Baker  
Director, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
P.O. Box 13087  
Austin, TX 78711-3087

Dear Director Baker,

Exposure to fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) has been strongly associated with adverse health effects. These microscopic airborne particles emanating from power plants, cars and trucks and industrial facilities, can lodge in lungs and enter the bloodstream. The recent analysis by the Harvard School of Public Health and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) reveals that exposure to particle pollution in the Houston area in 2015 alone contributed to more than 5,000 premature deaths and nearly \$50 billion in economic damages.

As you are aware, the EDF, using satellite data from the Harvard analysis, identified a large toxic plume of particulate matter in west Houston that was previously unseen. It went undetected for years because the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) has not monitored particulate matter in west Houston. It is likely that more monitors, spread spatially to cover west Houston, would have shown soot levels above federal limits.

Scientists believe the soot in west Houston comes from industrial and marine sources along the Houston Ship Channel, as well as diesel vehicles and construction equipment. These fine soot particles cause heart attacks, strokes and lung cancer. Exposure to these particles is the largest environmental risk for early death in the United States.

Federal rules require TCEQ to install monitors in areas with the highest levels of soot – and areas of greatest population exposure. The areas indicating high levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in west Houston are areas with higher population density. TCEQ has failed to meet this obligation in west Houston. It is clear that the region needs more monitors to meet federal rules. I strongly encourage TCEQ to install a PM<sub>2.5</sub> monitor in west Houston.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner".

Sylvester Turner  
Mayor