

Amid the frenetic days leading up to the November 2008 election, I read a quiet tribute to citizens of Donora, Pennsylvania. Late October 2008 was the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Donora smog incident of 1948. Since it is my turn to submit an article to the TVS newsletter, I thought the membership would be interested in the details of a significant event in the development of modern air pollution standards. The recent catastrophic spill of fly ash at the Kingston Steam Plant makes the Donora event even timelier since we may learn from history, but we also may take many environmental and health standards and protections for granted.

Between October 26<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> 1948, 20 people died and as many as 7000 were hospitalized or became ill as a result of heavy air pollution in Donora, Pennsylvania. The incident was related to emissions from the Donora Zinc Works and the American Steel and Wire Company. A museum has been opened with the slogan "Clean Air Started Here." Dr. Derra Davis, director of the Center for Environmental Oncology at the University of Pittsburg has written "When Smoke Ran Like Water". She is a Donora native, who was two years old at the time of the incident. The smog gained national attention and led to some of the first local and state pollution control laws and eventually to the 1970 federal Clean Air Act.

Smog was not unusual in Donora. However, an atypical weather inversion sat over the valley for five days. The inversion trapped a probably mixture of sulfuric acid, nitrogen dioxide, and other gases such as fluorine. The event has current significance as there are still situations where this could be repeated. The movement of heavy industrial processes overseas to countries to India or other Asian countries coupled with the lack of legislation in those areas would increase the likelihood of another tragedy. There are many helpful web links that detail the events more specifically. I urge you to read more if you are not already aware of this significant event of our environmental heritage.