



LETTER TO THE EDITOR: #ToxicTenWeek

Tips for writing a great Letter to the Editor

The Letters to the Editor section is one of the most read sections of the newspaper--by the public at large, and especially by decision makers who are trying to get a sense of public opinion. Published letters allow us to educate the public on our campaigns and influence decision makers. And a letter from a local citizen has a larger impact.

How To

1. **Be Concise:** A letter should be under 200 words and is more likely to be printed if even shorter.
2. **Focus on one clear point:** Pick one fact, aspect of the issue, or story for the letter.
3. **Make it personal:** The best letters are compelling and unique, rather than purely reasserting the facts. It is appropriate to convey your outrage, but avoid exaggeration.
4. **Reference/Respond to a recent article/letter/event:** Newspapers are more likely to print letters that show relevance and timeliness to issues the paper is already covering. Look through the paper for a story about the issue you are writing on or some other way to connect it, but don't force a connection. You can also link it to current events or anniversaries (Three-Mile Island, first national park etc.) to make it timely & relevant.
5. **Follow-up:** After you've sent your letter, call the editor and ask when they're going to print it. They get hundreds or thousands of letters a week, this ensures they read yours.
6. **Sign your letter** with your name, address, and phone number. They will usually call to confirm the letter before they run it.

Sample Outline:

- Use a catchy lead (personal, clever);
- State the problem / topic (why you are concerned and make it real for the reader);
- State the solution – name names if appropriate (i.e. ask Senator Smith to do X);
- Wrap it up with the final why – the more personal the better.

Talking Points:

- **Allegheny County is in the top 2% of counties for cancer risk from air pollution**, meaning that it's safer to breathe almost anywhere else in the US.
- **More than 70% of the industrial air pollution reported in Allegheny County comes from just 10 sources-- the [Toxic Ten](#).** The facilities emit dangerous pollution linked to cancer, asthma, and other health problems.
- **The Allegheny County Health Department needs to take bold action to protect our health.** The Health Department has taken steps in the right direction recently, including levying record fines against a major polluter, but much work remains to be done.
- **Throughout Toxic Ten Week, we're calling on County Executive Rich Fitzgerald to finally rein in industrial pollution by working with the Health Department to:**
 - Make sure the "Toxic Ten" have up-to-date Clean Air Act permits
 - Set stricter pollution limits on the Clairton Coke Works
 - Enforce meaningful penalties for illegal pollution
 - Give our environmental watchdogs the resources they need to go toe-to-toe with massive corporations