



June 22, 2026

Neil Deardorff
IDEM/OAQ/AMB
2525 North Shadeland Avenue, Suite 100
Indianapolis, IN 46219
ndeardor@idem.in.gov

Re: Public comments on IDEM's 2027 Ambient Air Monitoring Network Plan

Dear Mr. Deardorff,

The Conservation Law Center, Environmental Law & Policy Center, Gary Advocates for Responsible Development, Just Transition Northwest Indiana, the Northern Lake County Environmental Partnership, Abrams Environmental Law Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School, and Industrious Labs (collectively "Commenters"), respectfully submit these comments to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management ("IDEM") on its Indiana 2027 Ambient Air Monitoring Network Plan ("2027 Network Plan" or "Plan").

The Commenters are nonprofit organizations that focus some or all of their work regarding Indiana's air quality on the heavily industrialized communities of northwest Indiana, specifically in Lake, Porter, and La Porte Counties. Air quality is a significant concern among the residents in the Region which is home to a major oil refinery, three integrated steel mills, and dozens of other major sources of air pollution, three interstate highways, and other major roads and railroads. Our comments focus on IDEM's ambient air monitoring network in these three counties, but many of our concerns are applicable state-wide.

Last year, we filed comments recommending additional monitoring to improve and support the current network. Shortly after filing those comments, the Lake Michigan Air Directors Consortium ("LADCO") published its 5-year monitoring network assessment in which it pointed out that EPA funding for monitors has been stagnant to shrinking for decades and IDEM may not have the resources to expand its network without additional, permanent sources of funding.¹ While we continue to support a more thorough and robust monitoring network, this year our comments focus on improvements to the 2027 Network Plan and to IDEM's distribution of information from its network that require no additional funding.

¹ LADCO, 5-Year Monitoring Network Assessment for the Region 5 States (July 2025), at 26 (available at <https://www.ladco.org/wp-content/uploads/Documents/2025-Network-Assessment-Final-Report-Final.pdf>).

Our overarching comment is that the 2027 Network Plan may check the boxes required to comply with federal regulations, but it is not comprehensible to the general public, or transparent about the limitations of Indiana’s Ambient Air Monitoring Network. Public access is not merely a requirement of Section 58.10(c), but, we would argue, is an existential obligation of any government agency, particularly one whose mission is to protect public health and the environment. Every public meeting or hearing held by IDEM on a draft air permit in northwest Indiana over the past several years has seen local residents complaining that the air quality is a present danger and that IDEM is doing nothing about it.² As IDEM points out, many of these comments are based on a misunderstanding of the agency’s role and the scope of its statutory authority. But it is IDEM’s responsibility to inform the public about what it can and cannot do to protect public health and the environment. When it can do that consistently over time, it may find its budget increased.

The Commenters encourage IDEM to write its published reports in plain English wherever possible and to provide more detailed explanations of the more technical aspects. We provide four types of changes that we recommend IDEM make to its 2027 Network Plan.

1. Avoid apparent errors and ambiguities

The Plan’s discussion of the monitors in East Chicago appears to be erroneous. There are two monitor locations in East Chicago: one at the East Chicago Marina, 3301 Aldis Avenue (018-089-0034), and one about two miles south at the Washington Elementary School (formerly known as the Franklin School),³ 2400 Cardinal Drive (018-089-0006). In its 2023 Network Plan, IDEM noted that it was relocating a toxics monitor from Terre Haute to Washington Elementary. In every network plan since, including the 2027 Network Plan, IDEM lists Washington Elementary as having a toxics monitor along with PM10 and PM2.5 noncontinuous monitors, and a PM2.5 continuous monitor. Yet, Commenters were only able to locate information about noncontinuous PM10 and PM2.5 monitors at Washington Elementary.⁴ Even LADCO’s latest 5-year report was unable to find toxics monitoring data at Washington Elementary.⁵ Meanwhile, according to IDEM’s website, a toxics monitor has been operating at the East Chicago Marina since October 2012.

² See, e.g., BP Products NA Part 70 Operating Permit Renewal (Nov. 5, 2025) VFC #83890361 (Response to Comments at ATSD pp. 40-186); and Cleveland-Cliffs Steel LLC Part 70 Operating Permit Renewal (April 29, 2025) VFC #83799760 (Response to Comments at ATSD pp. 56-148).

³ IDEM repeatedly refers to this monitor as the “East Chicago – Franklin Sch.” monitor. The Benjamin Franklin Elementary School closed more than a decade ago. To improve public understanding, we encourage IDEM to use the current name of the school at the same location, Washington Elementary. Any confusion with the name change can be avoided by referring to the monitor’s AQS number.

⁴ Based on searches of both IDEM’s Data Management and Display System and EPA’s AirData Air Quality Monitors websites.

⁵ See LADCO, 2025 Network Assessment Story Map (available at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4956ef55f1314c3da31bca444a7a55ea>).

Even more troubling is the unexplained loss of all monitoring at Washington Elementary as of April 2026. In its 2025 and 2026 network plans, IDEM states cryptically that “Franklin Sch. site move from the rooftop has been delayed by communication issues with the school.” It does not explain where the monitor was to be moved to or what “communications issues” delayed this move for more than a year. In the 2027 Network Plan, IDEM states, “Franklin Sch. site relocation from the rooftop delayed due to the delay in completing the new enclosure on the ground. Intermittent particulate samplers moved in April. Toxics and continuous PM monitoring to be established upon receipt of equipment.” This is a significant loss of monitoring data that is poorly explained or justified. In short, the public has been misinformed about the availability of continuous PM_{2.5} and toxics monitoring at this location for four years and ill-informed about the loss of all noncontinuous PM monitoring data since April.

2. Unexplained determinations

The 2027 Network Plan disregards certain high PM₁₀ monitoring data from the Gary – IITRI (180890022) and Portage – Hwy 12 (181270023) monitors as “anomalous” without explanation simply because both sites recorded values above 150 µg/m³ in 2025. Why does this make these data anomalous? In fact, both the IITRI and Portage sites recorded PM₁₀ above 200 µg/m³ on the same day – March 15, 2025. Such unusually high readings on the same day cannot be so easily dismissed as anomalous without further research into unusual industrial releases or so-called “exceptional events” such as forest fires.

3. The over-use of unexplained technical terms

Air monitoring necessarily involves complicated equipment and those operating these monitors understandably rely on shorthand technical jargon. But the exclusive use of such jargon impairs public understanding. An example of such usage arises in the two network modifications for northwest Indiana proposed in the 2027 Network Plan. In Gary: “The BAM will be discontinued at Gary – IITRI (180890022) in favor of the T640 FEM method already present at the site.” While the acronyms BAM and FEM are helpfully defined on page 7, those definitions only help if the reader is familiar with a beta attenuation monitor and the federal equivalent method. Commenters are not seeking a detailed explanation of these two different monitor types, but the public is entitled to know why such a change is being made and what the potential pros and cons are of each.⁶ Similarly, in Michigan City, IDEM is: “Discontinuing PM_{2.5} FRM monitoring at . . . Michigan City – Marsh ES (180890011) in favor of the PM_{2.5} FEM method.” Changes to the monitoring network should be better explained so that the public can be better informed as to how IDEM is protecting their health.

⁶ This modification may be an improvement in monitoring quality and monitor reliability. See Hagler, G., *et al.*, Evaluation of two collocated federal equivalent method PM_{2.5} instruments over a wide range of concentrations in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Atmos. Pollution Res. (April 2022) (available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9907456/pdf/nihms-1851981.pdf>).

4. Responses to comments that are difficult, if not impossible, to understand

IDEM's responses to our ten pages of comments on the 2026 Network Plan is summarized in a single paragraph and addressed in two. IDEM discontinued the Gary – Burr Street monitor (018-089-0026) because it was “not a population exposure site as determined by siting criteria” but rather “was established as a source-oriented site. This exclusion is no longer going to be enforced which will require all data collected from this site to be flagged as Does Not Meet Siting, reducing its regulatory impact.”⁷ For a community looking for more information, not less, IDEM's explanation for the removal of this monitor deserves a more complete explanation.

The Commenters also requested that the IITRI not be excluded from calculation of the annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS due to the source-oriented location of the site. In response, IDEM stated:

This site originally was located nearly due south of the coke battery on the Gary Works property. IDEM acknowledges that this coke battery is now gone, removing the major point source that impacted the site. IDEM will work with this request and remove the exclusion from the annual average design value for Gary – IITRI. However, IDEM will note that the Gary – Madison St. site will remain the high value site for the city.

Here, too, IDEM's explanation for its siting decision defies understanding by the general public. Does “remove the exclusion” mean that IDEM will include the data? And will the data from the IITRI monitor be considered in determining Lake County's attainment of the annual PM_{2.5} NAAQS in the future, if it has a higher design value than the Madison Street site? If not, why not? While we appreciate that IDEM considered our comments and may have made modifications based upon those comments, we do not understand what modifications are contemplated or why.

Public participation in IDEM's compliance with its regulatory requirements can improve the agency's work product, analysis, and public perception. But if the agency does not adequately communicate using plain English that is accessible to the general public, those benefits will not be accrued. We urge IDEM to draft publicly available documents with a public readership in mind.

⁷ See IDEM, Indiana 2026 Ambient Air Monitoring Network Plan (July 1, 2025), at 80 (available at: https://www.in.gov/dA/82d2016721/2026_Annual_Network_Plan_FINAL.pdf?language_id=1).

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Thank you for considering our comments on IDEM's 2027 Ambient Air Monitoring Network Plan.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Zoeller
Senior Attorney
Conservation Law Center
mjzoelle@iu.edu

cc: Zac Adelman, Exec. Dir., Lake Michigan Air Directors Consortium (adelman@ladco.org)
Krista Bizzotto, U.S. EPA Region 5 (bizzotto.krista@epa.gov)
Jackie Nwia, U.S. EP Region 5 (nwia.jacqueline@epa.gov)
Michael Compher, U.S. EPA Region 5 (compher.michael@epa.gov)