

City asked to crack down on odor from Kleen Test plant

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Resident who says she's irritated by smell of dryer sheets plans petition drive to have nuisance ordinance enforced

For Amy Leder, the distinctive odor of dryer sheets that sometimes lingers over parts of Port Washington is a cloying stench that brings on a physical reaction.

"It clogs my throat. It gives me a headache," Leder said. "It doesn't happen that often, but when it happens, I can't be outside."

Leder, who lives on West Walters Street, said she is circulating a petition calling for the Kleen Test Products to contain the odor within its plant at 603 N. Moore Rd.

"This action will greatly enhance the quality of life and business opportunities in Port Washington, reduce allergic discomfort ... as well as save residents money by not having to air condition their homes to exclude the stink of Kleen Test," the petition reads in part.

"They don't have to close it down," Leder said. "I just want them to get a better filtration system."

Leder said she didn't know about the company when she moved to Port Washington more than two years ago.

"If I had known I had to smell dryer sheets, on some days really intensely, I would not have moved here," she said.

"Since I've been here, I find very few people say, 'I love the smell of Kleen Test.' Some people don't notice it. Most people can't stand it."

Leder said she has called City Hall and Kleen Test to complain about the odor to no avail. Because of that, she put together a petition asking the city to enforce its public nuisance ordinance in regard to the odor.

City Administrator Mark Grams said the city has received few complaints about the company in recent years.

"She (Leder) is the first to complain in a long time," he said.

Several years ago, he said, the city received a number of complaints about the odor, but since then the company has installed a new filtration system and instituted a policy not to leave doors open.

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That has largely solved the problem, Grams said, although there are occasions when the distinctive scent can be detected in the city.

“I haven’t smelled it much lately,” he added.

Mayor Scott Huebner said he, too, has received few complaints about the company.

“If the company’s not emitting anything hazardous, I don’t see where we would take any action,” he said. “If any action needs to be taken, it would probably have to be through the Department of Natural Resources.”

Huebner noted that many communities have distinctive smells, not all of them pleasant, and they linger all the time.

“You go to the Fox Valley and you smell paper mills,” he said. “This isn’t an everyday smell. They have taken steps in the past to minimize the odor. I don’t think it’s been as bad as in the past.”

Ron Dillahunt of the DNR said the agency has not received any complaints about Kleen Test for the past couple years.

“I have talked to a few people about Kleen Test in the past,” he said, adding that the DNR worked with the firm in the past to minimize odors.

The firm uses internal air scrubbers to reduce odors at the plant, he said, and keeps its doors closed.

“Those are the main things they can do,” he said.

The firm, he said, is not required to have an air permit from the DNR because its emissions are below the standards set by the agency.

Odor regulations are subjective, Dillahunt said, adding that the agency looks at frequency, intensity, duration and objectionability.

“It is not a foul-smelling odor,” he said, “The intensity hasn’t been that high when I’ve smelled it.”

A call to Kleen Test Products for comment was not returned.