

Frequently Asked Questions About the Mill

A Public Fact Sheet Drawn From Named Public Records

Citizens for Safe Water and Air - Port Townsend

PORT TOWNSEND, WA

This research has been compiled to the best of our ability from named public sources. If you believe any fact presented here is incorrect or incomplete, please contact safewaterandair@gmail.com so it can be reviewed and corrected.

We are Port Townsend and Jefferson County residents who are advocating for clean air, clean water and safe working conditions. This fact sheet answers common questions about the Port Townsend Paper Company (PTPC) mill using only named public records. Where a question cannot yet be answered from a verified public record, we say so plainly and mark it as an open item. We do not seek to close the mill or harm its workforce. We are neighbors asking questions.

The Basics

PTPC is a kraft pulp and paper mill on Port Townsend Bay that has operated since 1928. It sits in unincorporated Jefferson County, outside Port Townsend city limits. The mill employs approximately 300 people and produces approximately 1,000 tons of unbleached paper, containerboard, and pulp each day. It is owned by Atlas Holdings of Greenwich, Connecticut, a private holding company with more than 16 billion dollars in capital.

How Much Water Does the Mill Use?

The mill draws its water from the Big Quilcene River through the Olympic Gravity Water System (OGWS), the pipeline system it shares with the City of Port Townsend. The 2021 Water Supply Agreement between the City and the mill has been reported to set the mill's baseline water use at approximately 11 million gallons per day, which would be roughly 4 billion gallons per year, and to leave the mill accounting for over 91 percent of all water consumed from the Quilcene watershed. We are verifying these figures directly against the text of the agreement.

What the mill pays for that water is documented: approximately 1 dollar and 7 cents per 1,000 gallons at the 2021 signing, rising on a set schedule to approximately 1 dollar and 24 cents per 1,000 gallons by 2026. For comparison, Seattle Public Utilities charges wholesale untreated water customers approximately 2 dollars and 18 cents per 1,000 gallons and Tacoma Public Utilities charges approximately 2 dollars and 78 cents.

How Much Goes Into the Bay?

The mill discharges approximately 9.6 million gallons of treated wastewater into Port Townsend Bay every day, approximately 3.5 billion gallons per year, through two permitted outfalls (Outfall 001 and Outfall 005) in the Glen Cove area. Treated wastewater means the output of the mill's treatment system. It is not the same thing as clean water. The discharge is governed by National Pollutant Discharge

Elimination System (NPDES) Permit WA0000922, the federal water pollution permit administered by the Washington State Department of Ecology.

The current permit, effective June 1, 2025, sets daily maximum limits including 16,518 pounds per day of Total Suspended Solids (TSS), the solid particles carried in the wastewater, and 9,477 pounds per day of five-day Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), a measure of how much oxygen the discharge consumes as it breaks down, oxygen that fish and shellfish also need.

Substances present in the treated wastewater discharged into the bay include benzo(a)anthracene, chlordane, and pentachlorophenol. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies pentachlorophenol as Group 1, carcinogenic to humans, and classifies benzo(a)anthracene and chlordane as Group 2B, possibly carcinogenic to humans. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classifies all three as Group B2, probable human carcinogens.

The current permit contains no enforceable final limits on these three substances until 2029 at the earliest. The current permit also authorizes the mill to discharge approximately 7 percent more effluent than the prior permit. The current permit adds new monitoring requirements for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a family of long-lasting manufactured chemicals often called forever chemicals.

How Many Jobs Are at the Mill?

Approximately 300 people work at the mill today. That number matters, and protecting those jobs is part of why this group asks for a safe and compliant mill rather than a closed one. For historical context, the mill's own company history records a peak of 820 employees in 1955. Open item: the number of auxiliary and indirect jobs the mill supports in the county is not yet confirmed from a named public record. We are gathering this figure.

How Much Power Does the Mill Use?

Open item: the mill's total energy use, including natural gas, is not yet confirmed from a named public record in our hands. What is on the record now: the mill reports its greenhouse gas emissions to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with 62,519 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in the most recent reported year under federal accounting rules that exclude carbon dioxide from burning wood. The mill burns wood waste, called hog fuel, and operates a recovery furnace and a biomass boiler on site. We are compiling the full energy picture, including figures that count the wood burning.

How Is the Paper Made?

PTPC uses the kraft process. Wood chips, from whole logs chipped on site, from sawmill leftovers, and from recycled cardboard collected across the Northwest and Canada, are cooked under heat and pressure in a chemical solution that dissolves the natural glue holding wood fibers together. The freed fibers become pulp, which is pressed and dried into paper and containerboard.

The kraft process uses sulfur compounds to break down the wood, and the human nose can detect those sulfur compounds at very low concentrations, which is why a kraft mill has a characteristic smell. The mill treats its process water in a system that includes a primary clarifier added in 1971 and an

aeration stabilization basin added in 1978, then discharges it to the bay.

What Chemicals Are Used?

The core cooking chemical is white liquor, a hot, corrosive solution of sodium hydroxide, which is caustic soda, commonly known as lye, and sodium sulfide. After cooking, the spent solution is called black liquor, which the mill burns in its recovery furnace to recover chemicals and generate energy. On May 26, 2026, a white liquor tank imploded at the Nippon Dynawave mill in Longview, Washington, killing eleven workers.

White liquor is not regulated under the federal Risk Management Program (RMP), the federal system that requires facilities to plan for chemical accidents, and the Washington State Department of Ecology has confirmed that PTPC has no Risk Management Plan obligation and that no structural integrity inspection requirement applies to white liquor tanks. Open item: the quantities of these chemicals used per day or per year at PTPC are not in the public record we have reviewed. We are pursuing this.

What Chemical Compounds Occur in the Air?

The pulping process creates a family of gases called Total Reduced Sulfur (TRS) compounds, along with sulfur dioxide. The individual gases are hydrogen sulfide, which smells like rotten eggs, methyl mercaptan, which smells like rotten cabbage, dimethyl sulfide, and dimethyl disulfide.

In June 2024, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the federal public health agency that evaluates chemical exposures, published a health consultation on air near the mill. It found that the combined short-term exposure to these sulfur gases produced an acute hazard index of ninety. A hazard index compares measured exposure with the level of concern, and any value above one flags the exposure for further evaluation. Ninety is ninety times that screening threshold.

To be accurate about what the science does and does not say: hydrogen sulfide and sulfur dioxide are not classified as carcinogens, and the documented concern is short-term respiratory effects and odor impact, not cancer.

What Is in the Plume?

The tall, visible plumes from the mill's limekiln stacks are largely steam, meaning water vapor. The characteristic odor is mostly associated with the mill's 33-acre wastewater runoff pond, not the tall stacks. Beyond what is visible, the mill reported 416,729 pounds of total toxic chemical releases and transfers across all media in the most recent reporting year under the federal Toxics Release Inventory, the national public database of toxic chemical releases.

Air pollutants the mill has historically reported to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) include acetaldehyde, ammonia, and dioxins. Community odor complaints to regulators totaled nearly 2,000 between 2016 and 2021.

What Goes Out Into the Bay?

Approximately 3.5 billion gallons of treated wastewater per year, as described above, carrying solids, oxygen-consuming material, and the substances named in this fact sheet. In addition to the permitted discharge, the public record documents untreated wastewater spills, including approximately 114,630 gallons of untreated process wastewater discharged to the bay on April 28, 2025, the largest confirmed single untreated discharge in the public record.

In 2014, a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife study of crab and prawn tissue in this marine area found polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon contamination, a family of combustion-related and industrial chemicals, at levels statistically comparable to areas near Seattle and Tacoma. A human health risk assessment was never completed. That is a documented 2014 finding, stated here as history, not as a claim about today's conditions.

Where to Learn More and How to Help

Sign and share the petition: Protect Port Townsend and Its Bay, Demand Clean Water, Air and Safety Transparency, at change.org/safe-water-and-air. Reach the campaign at safewaterandair@gmail.com. Every fact in this sheet traces to the named public record cited beneath it. Open items are marked and will be filled in as verified records come in.

Sources and Citations

All factual claims in this document are drawn from the following sources, verified during research for this document.

1. City of Port Townsend and Port Townsend Paper Company: 2021 Water Supply Agreement, cited for the reported baseline water use figure of approximately 11 million gallons per day and the per-1,000-gallon rate schedule. This campaign has not yet independently reviewed the full text of the agreement; that verification remains an open item noted directly in this document.
2. Seattle Public Utilities: published wholesale untreated water rate schedule, cited for comparison.
3. Tacoma Public Utilities: published wholesale untreated water rate schedule, cited for comparison.
4. Washington State Department of Ecology: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit WA0000922 for Port Townsend Paper Company, effective June 1, 2025, cited for the two permitted outfalls (Outfall 001 and Outfall 005), daily maximum Total Suspended Solids and Biochemical Oxygen Demand limits, the delayed final limits on benzo(a)anthracene, chlordane, and pentachlorophenol, the approximately 7 percent effluent increase over the prior permit, and the new per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) monitoring requirement. Also cited, via the permit's supporting fact sheet, for the mill's process water treatment system, including a primary clarifier added in 1971 and an aeration stabilization basin added in 1978.
5. International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC): Monographs carcinogen classifications, Group 1 for pentachlorophenol and Group 2B for benzo(a)anthracene and chlordane.
6. United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Group B2 probable human carcinogen classification for benzo(a)anthracene, chlordane, and pentachlorophenol.
7. "Engage PT: PTPC Almost 100 Years of History," Port Townsend Paper Company company history material, cited for the 1955 peak employment figure of 820 employees.
8. Atlas Holdings: company press materials, cited for ownership of Port Townsend Paper Company through Crown Paper Group and the more than 16 billion dollar capital figure.

9. United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program facility-level data for Port Townsend Paper Company, cited for the 62,519 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent figure.
10. Mady Lyon, Professional Engineer, Washington State Department of Ecology: written response letter, June 10, 2026, replying to a June 7, 2026 letter from this campaign, confirming that Port Townsend Paper Company has no Risk Management Plan obligation, a determination made by United States Environmental Protection Agency Region 10, and that no state or federal agency inspects the structural integrity of white liquor tanks.
11. News reporting and encyclopedic cross-reference on the May 26, 2026 white liquor tank implosion at the Nippon Dynawave mill, Longview, Washington, cited for the fatality count of eleven workers; underlying facts cross-verified against contemporaneous news reporting where possible.
12. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR): Health Consultation and Exposure Investigation, Outdoor Air Exposures from the Port Townsend Paper Corporation, published June 24, 2024, based on air sampling conducted fall 2018. Available at: atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/pha/PortTownsendPaperCorp/Port-Townsend-HC-508.pdf
13. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR): fact sheet summarizing its 2024 exposure investigation, cited for the nearly 2,000 odor complaints recorded between 2016 and 2021.
14. United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Toxics Release Inventory, cited for the 416,729 pounds of total toxic chemical releases and transfers figure and for the historically reported air pollutants acetaldehyde, ammonia, and dioxins.
15. Washington State Department of Ecology: enforcement and spill record for the approximately 114,630-gallon untreated process wastewater discharge to Port Townsend Bay on April 28, 2025 (Glen Cove area).
16. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: 2014 study of crab and prawn tissue for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon contamination in the marine area near the mill.
17. Change.org: petition "Protect Port Townsend and Its Bay, Demand Clean Water, Air and Safety Transparency," at change.org/safe-water-and-air.