



**title:** Hazmat Kite

**materials:** Tyvek, graphite fishing rods, caution tape, string, wind, sky  
**dimensions:** 124 cm x 124 cm

**artist:** Ken Gregory

The Hazmat Kite was created as a site specific response to the smog problem in Windsor Ontario during an Artist in Residency at the Art Gallery of Windsor April 22 to June 10 2006. Windsor is on the border between Canada and USA with the Detroit river acting as a physical delineation of the border.

Detroit Michigan is right across the river from Windsor. Michigan has been historically an industrial state with automobile and steel production driving the economy. Coal burning power plants provide a lot of the power for these industries. Windsor's economy is very closely tied to the Michigan activity with auto manufacturing amongst others playing a big role in the economic evolution of the city.

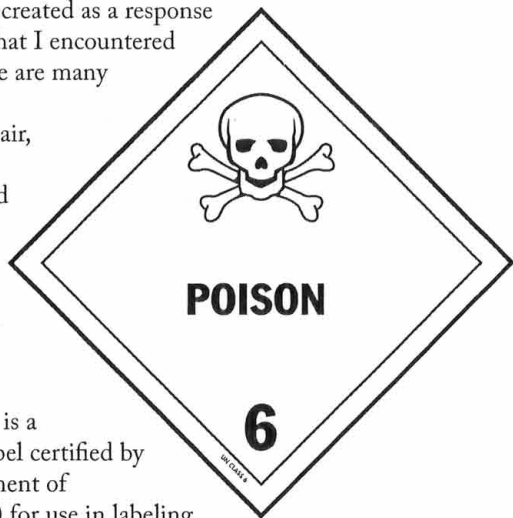
Although Ontario and Michigan have significant environmental policies and laws in place to govern all these industries there remains a very visible smog problem in Windsor and surrounding areas in Southern Ontario. So much so that part of the daily weather report includes an air quality forecast.

Various groups have set up studies to try and link the smog problem to health issues such as increased respiratory diseases, poor health and cancer in the local population. There are many attempts to identify the various culprits who are guilty for spewing dioxins, mercury, carcinogens, particulate and other air born chemicals into the air. Many studies and reports from various environmental groups, companies, citizens groups, industrial corporation spin doctors and government officials have been published with fingers pointed in multiple directions depending on who funded the report, what science was used to create the report and who spins the best media output.

During my 3 month tenure as Artist in Residence I was confronted by the air quality problems with very observable situations. If I left my apartment windows open, I would come home at suppertime to black particulate on all surfaces inside. I would often have eye problems that would leave me blinded momentarily while my body tried to deal with them. So much so that when I left I had to pull over on the highway every 50 kilometers or so with stinging watery eyes closed shut. During my work at the Art Gallery of Windsor I observed a brown/black haze over the downtown area on an almost daily basis. I thought to myself, everyone is breathing this stuff. That can't be good. Hence the kite.

The Hazmat Kite was created as a response to the smog problem that I encountered while I was there. There are many people writing letters, campaigning for clean air, fighting for better environmental laws and policies, complaining in the local media and protesting so I wanted to create a response that was an alternative to all that.

The diamond graphic is a hazardous materials label certified by the American Department of Transportation (DOT) for use in labeling hazardous materials during transport and storage. The skull and crossbones is a universal symbol that means whatever it is labeled with is poison, deadly to ones health. The 'inhalation hazard' means there is potentially dangerous stuff in the air, don't breathe it. And the numeral 6 refers to a class of toxic liquid substances that give off vapors that are dangerous for humans to breathe.



## Artistic license

I decided to label the air above Windsor as hazardous to inhale. I was already working on kites as a possible form for my artwork and was spending a lot of time researching kite designs, kite craft and kite culture. The kite was custom designed by myself and is a cross between a Delta kite and a Malaysian Fighting kite. This plus the fact that it was big for a kite made it chaotic and hard to control in certain wind conditions.

This kite was flown on the banks of the Detroit River on the Windsor side of the border many times during that time period. The most poetic and poignant moments came about as I was flying it near the Ambassador Bridge (one of many border crossings) with the kite juxtaposed against the back to back transport truck traffic slowly moving across the bridge and brown/black smog in the air above the river.

## Bio

Ken Gregory is an artist and hardware hacker based in Winnipeg Manitoba Canada.

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